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Detective Dick: OR, THE HERO IN RAGS.

BY CHARLES MORRIS,
AUTHOR OF "WILL SOMERS," "PHIL. HARDY," "PICA-
TUNE PETE," ETC.

CHAPTER I. A WARM INTERVIEW.

"Luck! You kin bet your bottom dime on that I've had a streak jist as big as the side of a mountain."

"Hold yer hosses a bit, Dick. Good luck can keep sweet till we're ready to use it. It's bad luck that goes sour. I never talk business on an empty pipe."

The speaker—a middle-aged man, with thick, grizzled whiskers, and a face as rough as a chestnut-burr—produced a handsome meerschaum from his

pocket, and proceeded deliberately to charge it with tobacco.

Dick sat, with a grim smile on his young face, curiously watching this process.

The pipe lit, his companion took two or three long whiffs, sending the smoke curling through the air, his face full of deep satisfaction.

"There. That's what I call comfort," he said, taking the pipe from his mouth to speak. "Now, Dick, you can unload."

"Ain't in no hurry 'bout that," said Dick, grimly. "Guess my luck 'll keep sweet a while longer."

"What do you mean, you blowed young rag doctor?" growled the man.

"Somehow I can't never talk biz'ness till I've had a puff," answered the boy, deliberately producing from somewhere in his odd apparel a half-smoked cigar. "S'pose you favor your uncle with a light."

The man looked half angry for a moment; then, with a short laugh, he handed Dick his pipe.

Dick proceeded with great nonchalance, to light his stump of a cigar, and while doing so it will be a good time to introduce him to the reader.

He was a short, well-set boy, of apparently some

sixteen years of age, though there was the worldly wisdom of a man in his not overly clean face. Dick laid no claims to beauty of countenance, but he had all the keenness of the genuine street-boy. His dress was a conglomerate, seemingly made up of stray bits of cast-off clothing, and long since worn into rags. A coat, which had been made for a taller person, came down nearly to his heels, while a limp, rough-and-ready hat was set as jauntily over one ear as if Dick was proud of its possession.

"There," exclaimed Dick, handing back the pipe. "That's what I call comfort." He put his heels on the table, tilted back his chair to a dangerous angle, and poured out smoke from his lips till his head seemed enveloped in a cloud.

"Well, if you ain't a cool coon," declared the man, with a look of some admiration. "If he ain't got the impudence of Old Nick himself, then I'll rent out my head for lodgings."

"Dunno who you'd git to rent sich an empty old barn of a place as that," was Dick's provoking retort.

"I'll set on you after awhile, and mash you, sure as my name's Ned Hogan," with a touch of spleen.



DICK RENT HIS EYES MEDITATINGLY ON THE CEILING WHILE HE EJECTED A RING OF SMOKE FROM HIS LIPS.

"You'd best dry up while your skin's whole. There's enough of this slack, now; let's hear what you done."

Dick bent his eyes meditatively on the ceiling while he ejected a ring of smoke from his lips.

"What's your favorite brand of cigars?" he asked, innocently, as if he had not heard Hogan's question.

"Do you want me to smother you?" cried the latter, pulling up his sleeves with grim meaning.

"I don't smoke none but Concha de Figaros," continued Dick, with sublime disregard of Hogan's threat.

"This is a genuine Concha. Jist smell that flavor if you want rose-water and cologne rolled into one and ironed out flat. Why, it's enough to make a man forget his grandmother."

"What gutter do you patronize for your Conchas now?" asked Hogan, taking the pipe from his lips.

"That's an out-and-out Continental. Guv me a young buck for holding his horse. I allers take him in cigars and nickels. Conchas, you see, is the poetry of my biz'ness. But nickels is necessary."

Hogan sat watching the boy as if uncertain just what to make of him. It was evident enough that Conchas were waste words with Dick. The latter smoked on in silence for a few minutes, looking his mollified comrade quietly in the face. Then, laying the smoldering remnant of his cigar on the table, he slowly let down his chair from its dangerous angle.

"Now, s'pose we come to biz," said Dick, setting his hat over the other ear, and buttoning one button of his coat.

"I'm agreeable."

"I ought have had it long ago if you hadn't loaded me up so short with your chocolate-colored pipe," with a comical grimace.

"Did you see Harris?"

"I've got a ridick'us whim that's the job I took on, and Dick fastened another button with great dexterity.

"When you find Dick Darling go back on his jobs you kin git out your mud-scrappers and scratch the river bottom for him. I'm one of the kind that kin bear death but not disgrace."

"Yer a blamed long-winded, short-haired, knock-kneed, imperient young son of a ship's monkey," growled Hogan, wrathfully.

"And if you don't come to the point soon there'll be a death in the hanging family, without the trouble of your drowndin' yourself."

And Hogan raised his short, sturdy figure from his chair, and laid down his pipe, as if this were his first movement toward putting his threat into execution.

"Thank you. Don't keef if I do, long as my Concha's smoked out," said Dick, quietly picking up his pipe and inserting it between his lips.

"There s'wars was something 'bout a genuine meerschaum that I liked."

He puffed away in seeming unconsciousness of the wrathful attitude of his companion, who stood as if overcome by this sublimity of impudence. Finally, with a short, savage laugh, he sunk again into his chair, exclaiming:

"I'll be shot if I don't b'lieve that boy would stop to argue the p'int if there was a pile-driver comin' down on his head. Come, Dick, now, what did Harris say?"

"Oh! he wasted a good many parts of speech tryin' to argify into me that boy's tongues were only made for ornament; which, in course, didn't stand for reason. He guv me a letter, though, which I guess will come to the heel of it quicker nor I kin."

Dick laid down the pipe, which Hogan made haste to appropriate. Then followed a general unbuttoning and diving into multifarious pockets, with which Dick's apparel seemed plentifully supplied. A general assortment of boys' pocket merchandise adorned one corner of the table as Dick emptied pocket after pocket in his search.

"Well, if it don't beat bugs and butterflies!" he exclaimed, indignantly. "I know I sunk it in one of my pockets; and there ain't a pick-pocket this side of Hong Kong could find a thing after it's once buried in my pockets. Can't find it myself half the time."

"You've lost it I'll be hanged if I won't grind it into soap-fat!" roared Hogan.

"Wish I'd got it insured. Mought as well made something on it," muttered Dick as he continued his investigation.

"Think I'll take out a policy on everything that goes inter my pockets arter this. Mought back up the insurance companies, though."

Dick took off his hat to scratch his head for an idea to help him out of the difficulty, when out dropped a crumpling letter; falling on the floor at Hogan's feet.

Dick looked down on it with an odd contortion of countenance.

"I'll sell my pet cat, if there ain't some sleight-of-hand about this," he protested, ruefully. "I see'd a Signor Blitz across the street. Bet he had a hand in puttin' that letter in my hat. Sich things don't do themselves."

Hogan paid little attention to the boy's mutterings, as he picked up the letter and tore it open, evidently anxious to learn its contents.

Dick moved to the other side of the table, as if for defense against the gathering storm that showed itself in Hogan's countenance, and stood slyly eying the strongly-marked face of the man, as his eyes ran down the epistle.

There were mutterings and grumblings as of distant thunder, as he continued to read. Finally, with a sudden outburst of wrath, he slapped the letter violently down upon the table, a prodigious crash breaking from his lips like that central peal of thunder which makes the roof rattle and the windows dance.

"May I be cantankerously smashed into tin six-pences, if this don't take the biggest rag off the hottest bush that ever I run across!" he ejaculated.

"Oh! if you ain't a genius for biz'ness," shaking his

list at Dick. "Lucky for you that the table's between us, if you think anything of your bones."

"What's wrong?" asked Dick, with childlike innocence of manner.

"What's wrong?" echoed Hogan, loudly. Then, suddenly lowering his voice, he asked: "Can you read?"

"Kin I read?" repeated Dick, indignantly. "Kin a duck swim? Kin a fox eat grapes? I'd be a purty graduate of the No. 1 Keystone primary if I hadn't h'isted in that much eddication. Wonder if he takes me for a fresh emigrant?"

"Read that, then, and out loud. I want to see how it strikes you."

"All O. K., uncle," assented Dick, confidently, buttoning up his coat till he looked like a trussed turkey. "Don't find me goin' back on literatoo."

He crammed his hat down savagely on his head, spread the sheet of paper before him, shut his right eye and scratched his left ear, as if these were necessary preliminaries of a dipping into literature.

"Hilderliff, April one, eighteen hundred and—a blot," began Dick, with slow and emphatic manner.

"Wonder if it ain't an April fool sell. Kinder looks like it."

"Go on," commanded Hogan, energetically.

"Edward Hogan, Esq. What's Esq.?"

"Go on."

"It means 'go on,' doesn't it? All right," said Dick, going on, with sundry interpolations of his own.

Dick was no great success as a reader of manuscript, and it was with many a trip and stumble over the big words, which stood like tall stones in his way, that he made his slow journey down the rugged pathway of the letter.

"Bus-i-ness is bus-i-ness (wonder if he thinks we want to be told that); 'and what is worth doing at all is worth a man doing himself.' (That ain't good grammar. Should have said hisself.)"

Hogan sat listening, with a smile of deep meaning.

"In what high-way or by-way of in-solence you picked up the boy you sent me I'd like to know, for I don't believe such crooked crab-apples grow in every orchard."

"Now who the dogs ever heered of a crooked crab-apple?" demanded Dick, looking up from the letter.

Hogan made no answer but a grim smile.

"As for in-trustin' any bus-i-ness of importance (guess big words is sold cheap in his country) to such a messenger, I would as soon put my hand in a hornet's nest after honey." (That's fun. Tried it myself once. Kinder 'preciate your feelings there.)"

"Blow me if it ain't like pouring water on a duck's back," growled Hogan. "I was fool enough to think there was some shame in the boy."

Dick seated himself before proceeding, leaning back, with his heels on the table, to the greater enjoyment of his literary task.

"I asked him to tell me where you were living, and he asked me if I wanted to buy him for a donkey? (Set he could be bought cheap jist then.) Then I re-quested to know his residence, and was informed that he lived at the corner of Goose and Spruce, next door to whale-bone alley."

"Don't he write a slashin' hand?" queried Dick, admiringly. "Jist look at that Goose! And he dashes off Whalebone as if it done him good."

"What did you tell him such stuff for?"

"Tweren't none of his biz'ness where I lived."

"He next took occasion to inform me that he was first cousin to General Grant, and nephew to the Emperor of China, and cared no more for my riches than a Newfoundland dog cared for a terrier pup." (That's a very well, Mr. Harris, but you ain't put in a word of your own impudence.)"

"You seem to enjoy that letter," remarked Hogan, with a grimace.

"It's kinder entertaining."

"I was next informed," continued Dick, "that the city I lived in wasn't fit for a respectable boot-black to emigrate to, and that it would do first rate to set up in a corner of a Philadelphia square as a specimen of a one-horse village."

"I tell you that fetched little Harris," Dick laughed, as if the recollection was highly agreeable.

"He talked so big of the City of Chester, that I couldn't help puttin' in a back-handed slap."

"You seem to have distinguished yourself pretty generally," said Hogan.

"I suppose these are enough il-lus-tra-tions (don't reckernise the word) of his mode of conversation," continued the reader. "I was silly enough to let him go on for an hour. (Don't know how you'd stopped him). I certainly shall not trust important business to such a messenger. You know where I live, and have not informed me where you live. Come down and see me yourself. Yours truly, H. WILSON HARRIS."

"Short and sweet; with oceans of my impudence, and not a word of his own," and Dick spoke indignantly. "That's just like men. They think boys ain't got no souls."

"You're a high old messenger. You ought to have a premium," said Hogan, sourly. "Do you know anything else?"

"Only that the schooner Lucy flung the hawser on Chester pier last night."

"The devil!" cried Hogan, rising so suddenly as to overturn his chair. "And he leaves the only bit of news worth a picayune to the last!"

He rushed hastily from the room, followed by an irritating laugh from Dick.

CHAPTER II.

THE SINGING LESSON.

HOGAN'S hasty journey was to the telegraph office. Arrived there, however, he was not so hasty in send-

ing his message, but spent full twenty minutes, with the aid of a pocket-dictionary, and a peculiarly cut piece of paste-board, in inditing it.

The clerk looked at it curiously, and then up at Hogan.

"Want this sent just as it reads?"

"Sartin. And maybe you'd better run it over to see if it's writ out plain. Wouldn't do to get one of them words wrong."

"H. Wilson Harris, Chester, Penna," began the clerk.

"Chocolate, cows, corpulent, cucumbers, criminal, carter, cake, can, combine, calico."

"CHARTER."

"Is that right? Your cipher seems to run to C's. Chocolate cows, and corpulent cucumbers are queer specimens."

"All correct. Hope it won't run to seed. Push her through, my friend. I expect an answer."

It was half an hour before the answer came. It was couched in the same cipher, which seemed to give Hogan more trouble to read than it had to write.

"Let me see," he muttered. "I told him to keep a spare eye for the Lucy, and especially for the red-haired mate. I judge this to be: 'I have been watching, but have seen nothing'—'cranberry,' what's that? Oh! 'suspicious.' 'Seen nothing suspicious. 'Will keep my—' 'curtain concert.' 'What the blazes is that?'"

Hogan thumbed his book for several minutes, then ejaculated:

"'Eyes open!'—Keep my eyes open! Hope you will, Harris. I am afeared, though, you'll have dust thrown in them. Wish I was down there myself, but I've got to pay my compliments to our mutual friend, Harry Spencer."

Hogan had long since left the telegraph office, and was making his way as rapidly as a street-car could carry him to an up-town locality.

Arrived in front of a stylish row of houses on North Eleventh street, he was met, as if by pure chance, by a plainly-dressed man, who had been lounging carelessly on the nearest corner.

"What news?" was Hogan's first remark to this individual.

"All serene. The bird is caged yet. Wish to Heaven he'd show a wing."

"You are too uneasy, Tom. I hope you haven't sold your business?"

"Do you take me for a fool, Ned Hogan?" answered Tom, angrily. "I haven't been shadowing rascals for ten years not to know the first ropes yet. Tain't for any young fox like this to run to earth under an old hound's nose."

"Been any signs?"

"A rusty-looking lad, that might have been a telegraph boy, went in half an hour ago. He ain't come out since. There was a very bright-faced young lady, too, went in an hour ago. She left just before you came."

"Bet on your having an eye for the ladies, Tom," laughed Hogan. "You can slide now. I'll take up the next watch."

They walked carelessly on together, Hogan filling his favorite meerschaum. He took a long, delighted puff at it, and then said:

"Be on hand at six, if nothing turns up before. I'll smoke him if he shows his nose."

Tom walked on, and Hogan turned on his heel, stationing himself in an indolent attitude against an awning-post, and smoking diligently as his eyes rested on the houses before him.

We will take the privilege of entering the particular house to which his attention was directed.

From the parlor of this rather plainly-furnished residence, a half-hour or so before Hogan took up his watch, there came the tones of a remarkably sweet lady's voice, accompanying the piano, in what seemed more of an exercise than a song.

The tones of the voice vibrated musically throughout the house, and might have stirred the dull ear of the watcher in the street had his soul been sensitive to the influence of music.

There mingled with it now the manly tones of a fine tenor voice, while more vigorous sounds came from the piano.

But we will intrude on this music-lesson, as it seems to be.

The young lady whose voice is so full of bird-like sweetness is a tall, beautiful girl, very stylishly dressed, a light-haired, blue-eyed witch, on whom the eyes of the gentleman are fixed in deep admiration.

He is a very handsome fellow, and has about him that ease and dignity of manner which seem to be the prerogative of culture. He is dressed rather plainly, but wears his clothes with an air that gives them all the effect of stylishness.

"That is well done, very well done," he says, approvingly. "The range of your voice has increased within the last few weeks."

"Do you really think so?" she asked, pleased with his praise.

"Yes; you struck that upper note clearly to-day. Last week you could not sound it."

"It seemed to me as if I must have reached the roof of the house," she returned, laughingly. "And now I think I must go."

"Oh, no! not yet," and he spoke appealingly. "I wish you to try this new song with me. It is a beautiful thing, and will just suit your voice."

"Love Waits," reading in its title, with a shrug of her shoulders. "Something sweetly sentimental, I suppose. What is love waiting for?"

"Heaven knows. If I were a lover, now, I could tell you what I would be waiting for."

"For a smile from the sweetest eyes under the sun," she read, looking intently at the music.

"Let me see them," and laying his hand lightly on her arm, he peered earnestly into her face.

"Oh! no nonsense," she exclaimed, turning quickly away. "You are a mere tease."
Yet the flush on her face showed that she was not quite displeased.

Without a word he laid the music on the piano, and ran his hand softly over the air.

"Do you think you can catch it? It is easy."
"Sing it yourself first. I want to hear the movement."

He sang with a great deal of feeling and power, the listening with a charmed expression as the rich tones of his voice filled the room with music. The song was deeply sentimental, and its fervent meaning thrilled in his voice.

"She is as winsome as the summer rose,
Ah! false was he that painted love's eyes blind;
The stars are paled when those bright orbs unclose;
Love waits no more when love's soft heart grows kind."

His voice lowered and vibrated strangely as he came to these last lines. He seemed to feel deeply the sentiment of the song, and held on to the "Love waits no more" with a fervent insistence that thrilled the heart of his hearer with deep emotion.

He was silent for a moment, the echoes of his voice seeming still to fill the room with music.

"Do you like the song?" he asked, quietly.
"Oh! indifferently," she answered.

"Will you try it now?"
"Not now. I thank you," coolly.

"The lesson is ended, then," shutting down the piano with almost a bang.

"Which lesson?" was her innocently-expressed inquiry, as her bright eyes rested a moment on his face.

"The music-lesson," he replied, rather curtly. "I was not aware that I was teaching any other lesson."

"Ah! true was he that painted love's eyes blind," she sang, with a laughing intonation.

She seized her music and turned toward the door. He stood irresolutely, his face flushed, his foot nervously tapping the floor.

"You shall not go till you have told me what you mean," he declared, suddenly taking her hand.

"Why, you wished me to sing it a minute ago," with a quick glance. "I hope I caught the sentiment properly."

"But your paraphrase? Your change of my words?"

"Excuse me. That is one of the things no woman explains," withdrawing her hand resolutely from his grasp.

"One moment, Helen; I have dared to think—I have dared to hope—"

She stood listening with downcast eyes, and with an undefined expression on her face. She was certainly not deeply displeased.

Yet he was not destined to finish his hesitating sentence.

The door near which they stood suddenly opened, and a boy, of the most unmitigated boyishness, stepped saucily into the room. It was no other than ragged, independent Dick Darling.

"Scuse me," he said, with a meaning glance from one to the other of the pair upon whom he had intruded. "S'pose maybe if I was to call ag'in, it might be more agreeable. I'll retire to a sofa in the parlor till you git through."

"Stay where you are, you wicked young rascal," cried Mr. Spencer, laughing in spite of his chagrin.

"Shall I see you to the door, Miss Andrews?"

"Don't you mind me," suggested Dick, reassuringly. "I never peach, no matter what signs I see."

He seated himself on the piano-stool as they left the room.

"I'll be shot if they wasn't making love! I swear, if I ever see'd sich fun!" a broad smile breaking over his face, as he brought his hand down for an emphatic slap upon his knee.

It fell, however, on the bank of keys of the piano, yielding such a clash of sound that the boy made a startled movement backward. The result was an overturning of the piano-stool, and a helpless rolling of Dick over and over upon the carpet.

"I wonder what blamed kind of a nitro-glycerine he keeps in that mahogany box!" he muttered, as he cautiously picked himself up. "If it often goes off that way it's what I should call a concealed deadly weapon. An' that's ag'in the law."

Dick eyed it askance, as if not quite satisfied with its proximity.

"There he goes. In mischief before he is in the house five minutes," declared Mr. Spencer, as he paused near the front door at the sudden uproar in the parlor.

"Who is he?" asked Miss Andrews.

"Oh! a young gentleman who has deigned to take me under his care, and who calls on me at the most inconvenient moments—rags an' all."

"He is ragged enough," she admitted, with a shrug.

"But I am intruding on your time."

Her voice was lowered in tone, as she stood a moment, her hand on the door knob, as if hesitating to open.

"When shall I see you again?" he asked.

"Oh! this day week, I presume; if nothing happens."

"Then, may nothing happen," he retorted, with a deep meaning in his tone. "Love waits, shall be our next lesson."

"Love waits no more," she sang, with a rosy aspect, as she quickly opened the door. "Good-day," and she tripped hastily into the street.

His face had a very happy look, as he turned back from the door.

"I would have liked to annihilate the boy, though," he muttered.

When he entered the room Dick was standing in the middle of the floor looking defiantly at the offending piano.

"What do you call that critter?" he asked, pointing to the instrument.

"That's a piano."

"Oh! that's a planer, is it? Does it often go off?"

"It is a little dangerous to boys, sometimes," admitted Mr. Spencer, running his fingers lightly over the keys.

Dick listened, with a pleased ear, to the rich tones of the instrument.

"Swow I didn't know it was bottled-up music. Got many tunes in it? Let's hear 'Hail Columby.'"

Mr. Spencer ran over the air requested, to the infinite delight of the hearer.

"Well, that beats a hand-organ holler-monkey and all."

"And now I want to know what made you bolt into the room without an invitation?" demanded Mr. Spencer.

"You ought to post your kitchen gal better. She told me you was here. I took that for invitation enough."

"In future you would do best to knock before entering my private room. What brings you here today?" He spoke a little impatiently.

"S'pose I knowed you was in here sparking that pretty gal?" and Dick buttoned his coat defiantly.

"Couldn't have dragged me in with a yoke of oxen if I'd a-knowed it."

"She's a pupil of mine, Dick. I was giving her a singin'-lesson."

"Oh! a singin'-lesson!" said Dick, with an incredulous wink. "Hope she likes singin'-lessons."

"What do you want, boy? I have no time to spare."

"Come here to-day to tell you your fortune."

"I guess I will excuse you that duty, then," with a smile. "I have no fortune to tell."

"More than you think, maybe. Give me your hand."

Mr. Spencer extended his hand to the boy, who took it in his own soiled palm.

"The lines don't come out clear," he muttered, after poring over it. "Maybe you'd best cross it with silver."

Mr. Spencer laid a piece of silver in his open palm. "That helps it amazingly," said Dick, as he quietly pocketed the coin. "Tell you what, there's fun here; and there's danger. Here's a light-haired lady gettin' into the house of life—and here comes a marriage with three bridesmaids."

"Drop that, Dick," and Mr. Spencer attempted to withdraw his hand.

"There's danger," continued Dick. "This line leads to trouble. There's a red-headed man in it. Best keep clear of red-headed men for the next month."

"Quick, boy; get done with this nonsense!"

"There's no nonsense in it," protested Dick, sturdily, poring more closely over the hand. "You were going to Chester to-day?"

"How under the sun did you guess that?" asked Mr. Spencer, in surprise.

"It's all here," declared Dick, slyly. "When you go there, keep clear of a red-headed man. If sich a one wants to talk to you jist knock him down or vamoose. There's a plot here."

"This is some rascally nonsense," averred Mr. Spencer, drawing away his hand. "What do you mean by it all?"

"Don't you go to Chester. That's what I mean."

"I do not think I will give up my journey on account of your fortune-telling."

"There's danger, I tell you," spoke out Dick, earnestly. "There's a red-headed man there, mate of the schooner Lucy. That's all I can tell you. You must keep clear of him. There's a game ag'in' you. If sich a chap wants to talk to you don't give him no closer quarters than you would a sketeer. There's danger afloat."

"What is it, Dick? What do you know?" demanded Mr. Spencer, impressed with the boy's earnest manner.

"Don't know half what I'd like to," answered Dick. "Only know that the devil's got his foot loose, and got his eye on you. There's folks tryin' to sell you out; jist you be sry."

"You are a strange customer. I shall beware of red-heads. If you have no more business, Dick, my time is limited."

"All right!" said Dick, going to the front window, and looking out into the street. "Is there an easy back way out of your house?"

"Yes. Why?"

"'Cause there's eyes in the front mustn't see me, that's all. Do you know that this palatial mansion is shadowed?"

"Shadowed! What is that?"

"Watched," explained Dick, mysteriously. "There's eyes on you that you won't easy fling off. Can't tell no more, but jist you beware." His voice had grown very low and mysterious. "And whatever turns up don't use my name. If I'm wanted, I'll be on hand!"

"All right," said Mr. Spencer, laughing. "I will be faithful to you to the death; and will avoid all red-headed men. This way, Dick."

In a few minutes more Dick was treading his way through back alleys, out of that neighborhood.

In a very short time after, Mr. Spencer left the house, and walked quickly down the street.

He cast a sharp glance around, but saw nothing more suspicious than a thick-set man leaning against a post and smoking a meerschaum.

CHAPTER III.

DICK GOES INTO BUSINESS.

Two gentlemen were seated in earnest conversation near the front window of a hotel room overlooking Arch street, Philadelphia.

One of them, a large, full-faced man, sat with his feet on the window-sill, in a remarkably easy attitude. The other was a small, delicately-framed man, who seemed to be greatly annoyed by some circumstance.

"Do you know, my dear boy, that we have so far been bamboozled? That's just the word for it—bamboozled," remarked the large man, with an ease that was not shared by his companion.

"A new ten-dollar issue on the market. The Faw-kusset bank. It's deuced provoking," declared the small man. "And after six months' work we haven't the shadow of a clew."

"Oh! it will come. It will come," protested the other, easily. "We have set things working, you know."

"Working against us, I fear," was the bitter reply. "We have just put them on their guard. The mystery grows deeper every move we make."

"Not a bit, my lad," declared the large man, unconcernedly. "We knew nothing then, and we know no more now. That is what I call *shaking a leg*. We will strike daylight yet, don't fear that."

"Well, if you ain't the confoundedest, easiest-going, most unsatisfactory specimen of a private detective that I ever run across then I'll sell out," cried the small man impatiently. "I believe if an earthquake were to rattle the house to pieces it wouldn't get a shake out of you."

"I don't know," was the quiet rejoinder. "The chills and fever tried it once. I was harder to shake than it was, though, so I shook it off. But, what is the good of worrying? You can't butter your parsnips by grumbling at your ill-luck."

"I have never been so long in the dark in any case I ever took on in my life," said the testy gentleman.

"And we are looked to, to do something. Here is a gang of counterfeiters flooding the country with bad money under the very noses of the Government detectives. There is not a month but that some new issue comes out. And it is no bungling work, I tell you. They are first-rate mechanics, and the keenest fellows I ever saw at hiding their trail. They are just shaming the whole Secret Service."

"Every dog has his day," declared the other, in his easy manner. "Let them alone. Give them rope. They will hang themselves yet. We have made ourselves somewhat too visible. We had better get back into the shadow and hide our hand. It sometimes pays to take to earth and only use your eyes."

"Yes, and let Pinkerton's men step in and take the game out of our bag," was the impatient reply. "I know they have scouts out. How would it sound to say that Will Frazer and Jack Bounce, the noted Secret Service officers, worked for half a year on a blind trail and then let themselves be pinked by Pinkerton. I shouldn't like to see that in print."

"Well, Jack Bounce, for one, don't care a fig," replied the large man, indolently shifting his feet. "If it comes to a free race between the detectives, the devil take the hindmost, that's my programme. But when I trouble myself about anything less important than burnt steak for dinner, or such like capital crimes, you can tell me of it."

"You are a regular philosopher, Jack," confessed his comrade. "I don't know, though, that it makes you any worse at your business. I suppose there is too much stir about me. My game leaks out. I don't know when I was ever more ashamed of myself than about something that happened to-day."

"Ah! Let's hear it," asked Jack.

"Do you know that I was accosted by an impudent young rascal in full street uniform—a cast-off coat and rags for breeches. He had my name pat, and my vocation, too, it seems. And, that wasn't all. He had smelt our business here, and was going to put us on some wonderful track for only ten dollars. I was more inclined to give the young villain a ten kicks. I never knew before that I carried my business in my face."

Before he got half-way through, Jack Bounce's feet were on the floor, and he was eying his comrade steadily.

"I didn't know that you valued ten dollars so highly."

"You know it wasn't the dollars."

"It looks devilish like it," was the vexed response. "You were out of temper, Will, and haven't got back to it yet; or you wouldn't have let that boy off so easily."

"You think, then, that he hadn't smelt my business?"

"I know you are not a fool. It don't do to shut any door in our own faces. You can take my word for it that it was not from you that the boy learned all that. He may have had the very clew that has been baffling us. I should like to see him."

"I think I should know him again," with a humility that showed that he felt the force of this reproach.

"Then you had best keep your eyes open for him," declared Jack, in decided accents. "That spring must be pumped dry."

Will's reply was a sudden leap to his feet and rush to the window.

"There he is now!" he cried.

"And sees you," added Jack. "See, he is coming into the hotel. He has not given it up yet."

"Had I best go down and look him up?"

"Wait, wait," ordered Jack. "You will never learn the virtues of waiting. If he knows us he will find us."

"Well, I wash my hands of the young villain. You can manage him."

A few minutes passed in silent waiting. Then Jack Bounce's policy was confirmed by a loud knock at the door.

"Come in!" he cried, resuming his easy attitude. The door opened and in walked Dick Darling, his

coat, as usual, dragging at his feet, and his face innocent of fresh water.

"Morning, gentlemen!" "Come here, boy, and let's have a good look at you," called out Jack. "Was that coat made to order?"

"I dunno that I'm playin' side-show for a circus," retorted Dick, sturdily. "An' if you don't like my ulster maybe you'd buy it at half-price and give me another."

"I'm not in that line of business," laughing. "Come up here so I can see you. What is your name?"

"Dick Darling, or Darling Dick. I'm called both ways."

"What do you do for a living?" "Anything that's honest and easy. I'll black your boots, if you want, hold your hosses, carry your bundles, or most anything else."

"And what are you after to-day?"

Dick's reply was to help himself to a chair, and to establish himself in the exact attitude of his questioner, with his feet on an adjoining window, and his chair tilted back.

"Can talk biz'ness a good deal better when I'm comfortable," he explained. "Don't pay to wait for invitations nowadays."

"Well, if he ain't cool enough to freeze hot water, I'll sell out," was Frazer's expressed opinion.

"Now, out with it, Dick," commanded Jack Bounce, in an amused tone. "What business have you in hand to-day?"

"I've giv' up all retail lines. I'm arter that set of counterfeiters that's making things howl in the money market, and that's laughin' in their sleeves at Pinkerton's and the Secret Service."

"What do you know about it?" asked Bounce, his feet falling to the floor in his surprise.

"I know that Will Frazer and Jack Bounce, two of Uncle Sam's best men, have been smellin' round for months, and haven't found a bad egg in the basket yet. I know that Ned Hogan and his pals think they've got a scent, which won't work up worth a dime. And, finally, I've got a stupid notion in my head that I see an openin' into the den of rascals."

"Ah! and what is your opening?"

"I wish you'd take a close look at my eyes, Mr. Jack Bounce, and see the color of them. If you can find any green there, then buy me cheap, that's all."

"Which means that you don't intend to tell me what you mean?"

"Which means," answered Dick, "that I'm on the make. I know there's money in this. I'm for my sheer, that's all. Don't calkulate to spend my life carting around an ulster that don't fit. I'm in for makin' my fortune, and goin' into fashion, and sich."

"What do you think of this fellow, Will?" asked Bounce, turning to his companion.

"I think he will never die from impudence striking in," Will answered. "He's took it, like the small-pox, on the surface."

"Maybe you and me can cry quits," retorted Dick, defiantly. "You took me for a sell yesterday; but I've a notion you sold yourself. Now I'll give Mr. Bounce his chance. If he don't take—why, me and Ned Hogan knows one another; that's a word to the wise."

"What do you want, Dick?" asked Bounce, in a tone of amusement.

"I want ten dollars now, to begin on. And I want to be let alone. Them's two things. I won't promise that'll be my last draw. It takes rhino to push these jobs through. If I have to shut up my office, I've got to be floated awhile in cash."

"Where is your office, Dick?"

"The last one I opened was on a toadstool seat in Independence Square," confessed Dick, with unabashed effrontery. "Maybe I can rent it out till I git through this small matter of biz'ness. I'm feared, though, it'll be hard to collect the rent."

"And what is our security for our ten dollars?"

"My face," looking Jack squarely in the eye. "If you can't see ten dollars wuth of honesty there, then we'll cry quits."

Dick rose from his chair and began buttoning his coat, his habitual action when he meant business.

"Of course it'll be sheer and sheer alike, in rewards, profits, and sich," he added, pausing a moment. "Do you take? If you do, look over the needful. If you don't, why, don't be long about sayin' it."

"Strictly to the point, Dick, eh?" said Jack, laughing. "Come, my lad, I shouldn't wonder if you did smell a rat somewhere. Guess I won't mind riskin' a ten on your personal security."

He took a bank-note from his pocket-book, and handed it to the boy in his easy, careless manner.

Dick examined it with the eye of a connoisseur.

"Well, do you think it crooked, eh?"

"Thought maybe it might be one of the new edition," said Dick, honestly. "I don't trust detectives too far; and you're a bit green to trust a street vagrant like me."

Jack Bounce laughed heartily with an amusement which was not shared by his companion.

"I can scent honesty in the air, my boy," admitted Jack. "That is part of my business. And shrewdness, too. That is in your face, or I wouldn't risk on your honesty alone. I think I can venture as high as fifty on the chance of your working up your scheme."

"I dunno," deprecated Dick, with a close setting of the lips. "You mought lose your cash. I've only got a pin-hole to see through, so far, but I've a notion that I can see a mighty long ways through it; and a thunderin' pile of rascality at the end. I'll telegraph when I want your help."

"In person or by letter?" asked Will Frazer, sarcastically.

"By an underground wire of my own. Guess I made all I can off you to-day. I'll vamose now till I want a few more of the dingbats."

With a dignity that would have done him credit in a stage tragedy, Dick stalked from the room, not deigning a glance behind.

"I think you are sold, Jack."

"I think not," unconcernedly. "And I've just backed my opinion with an X."

CHAPTER IV.

THE SELLER SOLD.

THE boy had designs on the ten-dollar bill which had hardly been contemplated by the giver. His next appearance is in a South street second-hand clothing establishment, surrounded by a plentiful array of "old clo'" which had experienced regeneration, so far as their sins of the body would admit.

The proprietor, a cadaverous-looking gentleman, whose well-hooked nose seemed the larger portion of him, came bustling forward to where Dick had planted himself firmly on his sturdy legs, and was surveying the stock in trade with the eye of a critic.

"What can I do for my young friend to-day?" asked the storekeeper, with a habitual rubbing of his hands.

"Dunno when I interduced you 'mong my friends," returned Dick, with a look of serene haughtiness. "Jist you keep your distance, Solomon. I didn't come here to be talked to death."

The proprietor drew back, as if abashed by Dick's reproof. The latter continued his survey of the stock, his nose superciliously in the air.

"Got any other room, where you keep raglans and cutaways and sich?" asked Dick.

"I've got a beautiful assortment here," the Jew declared, eagerly. "I know I can fit you out and make a regular little gentleman of you. What shall I show you?"

Show me your coat-tails, if you're goin' on this way," answered Dick, disgustfully. "Heaven take the gentleman that could be made of your polished-up old rags. Give us a squirt at that short-tailed beaver."

The dealer brought down the coat indicated, handling it with a look of intense admiration.

"What an eye the lad has!" ejaculated "Old Clo'."

"He has hit on the very finest piece of English cloth in my store, at first glance."

"Sure of that, Solomon?"

"Yes. Just look at the nap of that! And see how it is made. Look at that buttonhole!"

"Hang it up ag'in," ordered Dick. "I ain't buyin' naps and buttonholes."

"But, my dear friend—"

"Cheese all that, old boy! You're a good deal too fond of talk. Never seed a feller so chock-full of blow. Jist let me alone. I'm doin' my own buyin'."

The storekeeper looked as if he would like to give Dick the benefit of his boot and an open door. But the boy, with an exasperating indifference, continued his critical survey, and examined and tried on coat after coat with a fastidious taste that quite disgusted the salesman.

"I don't think I have anything to please you," declared the latter, at length.

"Well, it makes blamed little difference what you think," rejoined Dick, independently. "I'm here to do the thinkin'. What do you want for this scoured-up old rag, now?"

Dick had on a coat the very reverse of the one he usually wore. The tails reached but little beyond his waist, and it looked like a roundabout which had undergone a partial process of development into a frock-coat.

"Rag!" screamed the Hebrew. "If he ain't the funniest fellow. Best French cloth, and very little worn, and to call it a rag! Why, jist look at that gloss! And it is the latest style."

"Yes, I see that gloss," was Dick's curt answer.

"Looks as if the owner had spent his time polishin' lamp-posts. Can't say that I keer much for style."

Dick half dislocated his neck trying to twist his head around to get an idea of the set of the coat in the back.

"Come here. This way. To the glass," suggested the Jew, hustling Dick eagerly before a very small square of mirror.

"How much is a feller 'spected to see of hisself at once in that bizness?" asked Dick, impatiently, after vainly endeavoring to see from his waist to his shoulder.

"Let me hold it for you," said the Jew, eagerly.

"It's a beautiful fit—beautiful! See how smooth it sets in the back. Such an elegant fit!"

Dick got his head round over his left shoulder, but failed to see the wrinkles which the Jew was industriously smoothing out.

"Mought pass if the price was agree'ble. What's the plunder?"

"That coat ought to bring not a penny less than ten dollars, and dog-cheap at that, for such a piece of cloth."

"Cheap at that, eh? What price mought it be dear at?" asked Dick, sarcastically.

The Jew held up his hands with a sickly smile.

"Well, if he ain't a droll one!" he exclaimed.

"Take a squirt at that bit of broadcloth, Solomon," and Dick picked up his own old coat. "Jest look at that elegant garment. Observe the buttonholes, and the nap. Git your optical organs on the style. See here, Sol, I'll make a trade with you. What'll you give to boot?"

"What! for that dilapidated old—"

"Don't run that coat down now. It's stuck by me through sun and rain. You mought be glad to git a

faithful old piece of broadcloth like that. It only wants some scourin', and a stitch or two."

The Jew examined it all over with the eye of an artist.

"Give me five dollars and I'll trade," he said, at length.

"Guv you five d'imonds!" answered Dick, contemptuously. "Make it even up and I'm your man; and you've got a dead bargain."

"What, give that elegant French cloth frock for this old sack!" exclaimed the Jew. "Do you think I'm breaking up business? Five dollars boot is a ruinous sacrifice."

"Here you are, Sol," and Dick pulled out a two-dollar bill. "Say the word on the nap, quick as greased lightning. Got biz on hand, and can't stand palaverin' with you."

"Four dollars. And that's a great fall," responded the Jew, decidedly.

"Here's your old antiquity then," cried Dick, hastily stripping off the coat. "Hand over my Japanese broadcloth."

"Make it three," conceded the Jew, as he saw Dick walking briskly to the door.

"Two. And that's the last word," responded Dick, decidedly, as he emerged into the street.

"Come back," groaned the Jew. "I can't bear to see you leave such an elegant fit behind you. But, I'll be ruined entirely if I make many such sales."

"Oh, yes! you are a generous-hearted old cuss," and Dick resumed the coat, and passed over his two dollars. "The city ought to make up your losses. You're a charitable old beat, you are. And with a smile of contempt Dick left the store, proud at heart of his new attire."

"Well, if I ain't done the Jew! Didn't think old Solomon would bite at such a gudgeon as that. It's enough to make a chap feel proud he's a human, to sell that skinny old penny-squeezer. I feel jist one foot higher."

And laughing repeatedly to himself at thought of his great bargain Dick progressed through the classic precincts of South street, entering store after store, and picking up new cheap articles of apparel at ruinous prices, until he emerged like a butterfly in spring array, and minus five dollars in pocket.

"Guess I'm gay and lively now. Fine feathers make fine birds."

Disposing of what remained of his old suit, Dick took his way to the vicinity of a large stationery establishment on Chestnut street above Eighth. Here he was seized with a desperate attack of lounging, and spent several hours with no other apparent purpose than to display himself in his new spring suit to the fashionable denizens of that locality.

Yet it might have been noticed that he paid his regards to the store in question so closely that not a soul entered it without passing under the ordeal of his eyes. Not until the store closed for the night did Dick cease his task of espionage.

The next morning found him on his post again, and though hour after hour passed he never strayed beyond easy eye-shot of the paper-selling establishment.

Yet Dick was not without his sources of entertainment. One of these was the pulling of a torn envelope from his pocket, and looking through the paper toward the sun.

He always returned it to his pocket with the remark:

"There's riches in that. That bit of paper is my end of the trail."

His other source of amusement was the thought of how he had done the Jew.

"Jist to think of old Sol tradin' off an elegant coat like this for my old resident!"

It seemed as if he could never think of his shrewdness without breaking into a fit of laughter. Passers-by turned in startled surprise at Dick's sudden explosion of merriment, only to see him surveying his new coat with vast complacency.

"No use talkin'. I'm great on a bargain. Wish my chap would come. It's past dinner-time, and I'm gettin' holler."

His wish was speedily gratified by the entrance of a person to the stationery-store whose appearance gave Dick a sudden start. In a minute more he was across the street and had entered the store behind this person, a tall, handsome, well-dressed man.

"Have you the paper ready which I ordered last week?" he asked, of the proprietor.

"Yes, sir," replied the latter, proceeding to get it, while his customer quietly waited.

"Is it the Gordon Mills paper, as I ordered?"

"Certainly, sir. You may see the water-mark," holding up a sheet before his eyes.

"What will you have?" asked a salesman of Dick.

"Got any nice note-paper, with double D. for a monygram?"

"I can let you have it with D."

"I want double D. or nothing," said Dick, positively.

"I can have it made for you."

"Can't wait. The 'establishments I deal with all keep double D's. Didn't know this was a one-hoss retail concern, or wouldn't patronized you," said Dick, walking out with great dignity.

The gentleman with his package of paper had just left the store, and Dick kept his eyes intently on him as he followed him rather closely.

Passing up Chestnut street he came, near Tenth street, face to face with Miss Andrews, whom Dick at once recognized as the pupil in the singing-lesson he had interrupted.

The gentleman nodded familiarly to her as he passed, a fact of which Dick made a mental note as he continued his close pursuit.

The line of pursuit soon left Chestnut street, and followed less frequented streets in an up-town direction.

The gentleman walked along in an easy, careless manner, occasionally pausing to glance in a window, or casting a quick look behind him.

Thus they went on for several squares, Dick keeping rather close to the apparently unconscious object of his pursuit. He turned at length into an unoccupied by-street, through which he more slowly proceeded.

Near the further end of the street he entered a narrow alley, Dick hurrying up lest he should lose sight of his prey.

What was his astonishment, however, on arriving opposite the alley, to find himself in a tight grasp, and the face of the gentleman looking sternly down on him.

"Look here, boy, were you ever well kicked?" asked the gentleman.

"Never by a jackass," replied Dick, saucily, striving in vain to wrench himself loose.

"You young villain! You've followed me now from Chestnut street. If I am not mistaken you were in the store where I got my paper. What you are after the Lord only knows, but if I catch your dirty face at my heels a square further I'll leave you in a condition to be carried home on a shutter." And loosing Dick with a contemptuous shove, the gentleman walked on.

"Look here, mister," called Dick, after him, "how many of the streets 'bout these diggin's mought you own?"

"What do you mean, sirrah?" was the angry reply.

"Only thought maybe you might rent me enough for a boy of my size to get through. Seems somehow a feller's got to ask you what streets he kin go through."

The gentleman walked on, without answering this home thrust.

"Bet I had him there," thought Dick. "That's as good a sell as I got on old Sol. Wonder what rent he'd take for a foot or so of pavement."

The joke seemed so good that he broke into a loud laugh, slapping his knee heartily in his enjoyment.

A most unexpected result occurred. A sound of ripping cloth was heard, and the new coat split in the back from shoulder to waist.

It was a most rueful face that Dick wore when he put his hand back and discovered the nature and extent of the accident.

"I'll be fizzled for a salt mackerel if old Sol didn't sell me, after all!" he ejaculated. "Guess I'd best go back, like a blamed young fool, and trade even up for my old ulster."

Recollection of his pursuit returning, Dick looked up quickly. The gentleman had disappeared. He ran hastily to the next corner. In vain; there was no such person anywhere in sight.

CHAPTER V.

THE RED-HAIRED STRANGER.

To Harry Spencer, whom we left on the verge of his trip to Chester, on an errand which we have so far but vaguely outlined, the mysterious communication of Dick Darling had not been without its effects on his mind, despite his seeming disregard of it.

His acquaintance with this young gentleman had been rather romantic in its character, and one calculated to give him confidence in Dick's good intentions.

It had commenced by his saving the boy from a severe drubbing with which Dick was threatened by some of his associates. Dick was just then spooling for a fight, and had stirred up a state of active war among his companions from which he seemed likely to emerge badly defeated.

Harry Spencer had witnessed this affray—and taken such active part in it as to rescue Dick from his assailants, with no deeper wounds than a black eye and a bleeding nose. This assistance the boy had construed into an alliance, offensive and defensive, and he had since done his new friend more than one service from a sheer sense of gratitude.

"The boy is shrewdness itself," Harry mused, as he sat in a car of the railroad leading south from Philadelphia. "This stuff of the fortune-telling is only one of his oddities. He knows something which he does not wish to divulge, and takes this ridiculous way of warning me of some danger. As to my house being watched, that I can hardly believe. I certainly saw no one but a common-looking man clouding himself in the smoke of a huge pipe. I hardly fancy that he had any ulterior designs."

Yet this common-looking man, with that innocent pipe in his pocket, was at this moment in the same car with his unsuspecting prey, pursuing him as keenly as the hawk follows his quarry.

He took a letter from his pocket and read it carefully, replacing it again with an air of much satisfaction.

This action was imitated by Harry Spencer, who also produced a letter, which he poured over intently, his face expressive of great uncertainty.

"I wish I could see through the mystery of this strange business. I wonder if Dick, in his roamings through all sorts of places, has caught sight of something threatening to me? But that is nonsense; where have I an enemy?"

He read the letter over again, carefully considering every word.

"If you would hear of something very greatly to your advantage," he read, "you will be in the city of Chester at three o'clock in the afternoon of April 10th. You will find the writer of this in Morgan's restaurant at that hour, seated at a side table. Address the person with a green sprig in his button-

hole. He knows and will tell you something in regard to the great mystery of your life. Don't fail, if you value wealth and honor. "YOUR FRIEND."

"Is he my friend?" asked Harry, dubiously. "It would be no new event for a wolf to wear sheep's clothing. I must bear myself very discreetly in this business."

He saw new reason for doubt on his arrival at the depot in Chester. For turning suddenly after his leaving the car he caught sight of a man just stepping down from the same car whose face seemed to him remarkably like that of the man with the meerschau.

The person, however, seemed to pay not the slightest attention to him. On the contrary, he turned and made his way to the upper end of the platform. Arrived there he took a narrow street that led down toward the Delaware, and was lost to sight. Harry stood watching until after the train had been gone for several minutes, but there was no sign of an intention to return.

"I believe I am growing foolishly suspicious. Dick's nonsense has infected me. I do not know what wonderful discovery I shall be making next."

He took his way leisurely down the main street of the town, examining with a curious eye the obvious strife between antiquity and the modern spirit of innovation which here plainly displayed itself. For this main street yet held the odor of the original town, in which civilization had set its foot before William Penn saw occasion to cross the ocean.

Passing the ancient court-house, now used as a lecture and concert-room, the clock in its belfry pealed out the note of three.

Harry started at the warning and somewhat quickened his pace, though his mind was far from made up yet as to what action he had best take.

Turning into James street, he soon saw the sign he had been looking for, "Morgan's Restaurant," glaring in great gilt letters above the front of a rather narrow store.

Harry paused a moment irresolutely at the door, gazing absently up the street. In the distance he caught sight of a thick-set man, who vaguely reminded him of the man of the pipe. This person had just reached the main street, into which he turned.

"Another false alarm," thought Harry, smiling. "I wish Dick had not put such nonsense into my head. I will be seeing something suspicious in my own shadow next, and accuse it of following me with dangerous designs. Well, here goes. The quickest way to get over the fear of cold water is to plunge in."

He opened the restaurant door and quickly entered.

A glance showed him the state of affairs within. It was a narrow, long room, containing some dozen of tables, three or four of which only were occupied. Avoiding any attention to these persons Harry gave an order for some slight refreshment, and seated himself at a table near the front, looking down the room.

He sat idly playing with a spoon, and carelessly eying the persons present. Two of these were apparently a young man and his sweetheart, with the fresh impress of the country on their faces, who were enjoying their ice-cream as if luxury was just then a far more substantial thing than love.

There were two others near by these lovers, a plain, mercantile individual, who was swallowing his ice as if an enemy had just attacked the town, and it was necessary to put it out of sight at once if he would save it.

In strong opposition to him was a dapper personage who seemed determined to get the acme of enjoyment out of every morsel of his repast, and who looked with amazed surprise at the way in which the rapid eater seemed torturing himself.

There was one other person present, in the lower end of the room, who was quietly enjoying a substantial plate of roast beef, and whose eyes had been fixed on Harry ever since his entrance.

He was short, slightly-built, and with a thin, light-complexioned face, lit up by keen gray eyes. There were two main particulars, however, which Harry chiefly saw in him. One of these was a green leaf at the lapel of his coat. The other was a plentiful display of hair of a decided reddish tinge.

Harry gave a slight involuntary start at this discovery, the warning of his queer young friend returning to him with convincing force.

"Dick knew more than he would reveal," he thought, as he bent his eyes resolutely on his plate. "There is certainly something wrong. I shall have nothing to do with this man."

His mind thus made up he quickly rose, and paying for what he had ordered, left the saloon.

Yet he had not taken ten steps outside before he was accosted by a strange voice.

"Excuse me, Mr. Spencer," was the remark thus heard. "May I have a minute's conversation with you?"

He turned to behold the red-haired man of the saloon.

"I do not know where you learned my name, sir," he coldly replied. "You are a stranger to me, and I have no desire for communication with strangers."

"I know more of you than you are aware," returned the stranger, politely. "My object in this interview is entirely your own advantage, not mine."

"I wish no advantage from you, sir," said Harry, walking on decidedly. "Nor do I care to prolong this conversation."

The stranger gave a quick glance backward. Not ten feet behind them was visible the form of Harry's persistent pursuer, who was lounging along as if the shop-windows were his only aim in life.

A queer smile came upon the spare face of the man, as he again said:

"Suppose I desire to tell you something about that which has been the great aim of your life? Suppose I know something concerning that strange mystery of your parentage? Would my communication be then of no interest to you?"

Harry turned sharply upon him. "What do you know about it?" he sternly demanded.

"You are entirely too energetic, my dear sir," replied the other. "I know much more than you imagine, and more than you can readily find out without my aid."

"And what is your object in appointing this interview? If you have such information, what do you expect to make by it?"

Harry's tone was sharp and decisive. Evidently he was exceedingly doubtful of the man, and a little fearful of prolonging this interview.

"Of course if I should assist you to wealth, for instance, I should expect to be remembered," said the man, smiling. "I never did anything for pure love. Certainly ten minutes' talk with me won't hurt you. Step here into Price's for ten minutes only."

"I don't think that I am seriously afraid of you, or of any man, for that matter," Harry remarked, as he followed into a corner tavern.

It was nearer a half-hour than ten minutes when Harry emerged into the street, leaving the red-haired man behind him. The first person he saw there was no other than the man of the meerschau, who seemed deeply interested in the movements of a fish-woman.

Harry looked him sharply in the face as he passed, half inclined to accost him and accuse him of persistent dogging of his steps. But the man looked so unconscious of his presence, and it grew so doubtful whether he really was the man whom he supposed him, that he walked on without speaking.

The man paid no seeming attention to him. He waited until Harry had got some distance up the street, and then turned and entered the hotel.

Looking sharply around, he soon caught sight of the red-haired man, who was seated at a table, quietly sipping a glass of ale, and examining some loose papers. He looked up with an odd expression at the entrance of Ned Hogan, for it was really he. But the stranger paid no further attention to him.

Hogan stood undecided for a minute, then called for and drank a glass of liquor, and left the saloon without speaking to the stranger.

"Guess I'd best not break the ice till it's froze harder," he mused. "Harry Spencer's nailed if I ain't badly sold. I must see Harris."

He soon turned from the street into an office that had for sign:

"H. WILSON HARRIS, Attorney-at-law."

The occupant, a short, dapper, important-looking personage, glanced up at Hogan with a look of recognition.

"I have been expecting you. Take a chair."

"Anything new turned up?" asked Hogan, as he threw himself into a chair that creaked with his weight. "How about the Lucy and the red haired mate?"

"You are too quickly at the point, Mr. Hogan," replied the consequential lawyer. "I have a remark to make first."

"Out with it then!"

"What did you mean by sending me as a messenger that compound of impudence, dirt, and rags, that brought your letter and with it nine-tenths of the impertinence of all the Philadelphia streets?"

"S'pose I answer your question by asking another? What did you mean by getting riled at a boy's pranks and giving business the go-by?"

"It was more your business than mine. I did not relish being subjected to a bootblack's insults."

"Ain't you mighty thin-skinned for a lawyer, Mr. Harris? I sent that boy because he's a sharp young rascal, and was the handiest that I had. You'd maybe see more of him yet. But let's get to business. How about the sandy-haired mate?"

"He is living very quietly at Price's. He seems to have no business and to know nobody. His time is spent in lounging about the town."

"And the Lucy? Anything mysterious about her? Any sort of cargo landed?"

"Nothing. She lay quietly at the wharf for a day or two. She has been gone."

"Gone! The deuce!" exclaimed Hogan.

"No, the Lucy," quietly replied Harris.

"Where did she go?"

"She slipped out between two suns. Nobody knows when or where."

"What kind of a vessel was this Lucy?"

"A two-masted vessel. Not very large, or very new."

"An old schooner. And that's all you know about her? You've got a better eye for a law-paper than a vessel, Mr. Harris. I bet I'll find some old river salt on the pier who will tell me all about her."

"That may be," admitted Harris, as Hogan rose to go. "Look for old Mr. Pike. He sees everything down that way."

Hogan made his way quickly to the main wharf of the town, on whose verge stood the old Steamboat tavern, a revolutionary relic of the past.

On the porch of this edifice stood a tall, straight, grizzled old man, with his eyes fixed lovingly on the river.

"How is my old friend Pike?" asked Hogan, vigorously clapping his hand.

"Oh, prime, sound, and sweet," was the old man's rejoinder. "Anything new stirring hereabouts? Any new craft in, or the like?"

"Nothing but a schooner that crept in a day or two ago, and crept out ag'in last night."

"What kind of a looking craft?"

"A very rakish build. Very low down amidships."

Painted black, with a red streak. Carried a heavy show of canvas. Should say she was built for a yacht, and has grown old in service."

"Did she land anything?"
"I did hear of some things being taken off of her at midnight. Joe Bower happened to be prowling around. What's the matter? Anything wrong?"
"No. Which way did she go?"
"Up the river."

"Thank you, Mr. Pike. How's shad-fishing going to work this spring?"
"Prime!" declared the old man, with enthusiasm. "There's show of a heavy run. The nets made a fine haul yesterday."

After a few words more of desultory conversation, Hogan left the old river-dog and made his way back into the town.

CHAPTER VI.

HELEN ANDREWS'S TWO VISITORS.

It was with great amusement that Harry Spencer beheld a spectacle which the reader has already seen. It was no other than that of a half-grown boy who closely resembled a locust in the act of shedding its skin.

For his short, tight coat was split down the back, from shoulder to waist, the gaping wound revealing a plentiful display of dingy shirt.

Dick Darling, for it was he, turned with a rueful face that brightened somewhat on seeing Harry.

"Why, what under the sun has happened?" asked the latter, laughing. "Is my old friend Dick about to drop his skin and come out new, like a butterfly?"

"A high old butterfly I'd make, wouldn't I?" and Dick twisted his head around in an effort to see the middle of his back. "Is my coat tore?" he asked, as if he had just discovered something wrong.

"Badly demoralized, Dick. But where did you get such a spruce rig? I never saw you dressed so much like a dandy before."

"It's a bran-new suit," protested Dick, with some pride. "Cept that I've a notion it's been on some fool's back afore mine. Bought it from Sol Sly, a South-streeter. Reckon he thinks he's sold me as well as the coat. Shouldn't wonder if I'd pay my 'specs agin to that mercenary individual. Got a pin?"

Dick had off the obnoxious coat and was striving to pin together the gaping seam. Harry supplied him with a pin or two more, with the aid of which he drew together the greater part of the rip.

"Bet I'll square with old Sol for this," he declared, as he carefully introduced himself again into the dubious garment. "It was too tight for the pins to do their full service, and the one great wound was exchanged for a half-dozen narrow openings."

Harry laughed again as he inspected Dick's appearance.

"That is a decided bit of sharp practice. You had better see if your tailor won't exchange."

"If he don't I'll punch his blasted old head," said Dick, wrathfully. "Went and swopped my ulster for this top-sided cobweb, and giv' boot, too!"

"Well, I must be going, Dick. I hope you will get even with your man."

"If I don't, sell me for a fried oyster. But, there's somethin' I want you to tell me afore you git away."

"All right. Let me hear what it is."

"I s'pose you recollect a sort of good-lookin' young gal that takes singin' lessons from a Mr. Spencer that I know, and that hangs round the pianer arter the lesson's over?"

"Suppose I do? What then?"

"Only I've got some private biz'ness with that blue-eyed angel, that's all. Want to know where she lives?"

"What business can you have with her?"

"Oh! private. Tain't none of yourn. Don't calculate to mention your name."

"I am afraid the young lady may not thank me for sending her Dick Darling as a visitor."

"Don't you worry your cranium 'bout that. Guess I look spruce enough to pay my 'specs to the gal. I'll git a couple of pins more in my coat first."

"Well, here are her directions," and Harry wrote down an address on a card. "No nonsense now, Dick. I can't imagine what business you can have with her."

"Your 'magination ain't very profuse. Didn't take my warnin'. Went to Chester and see'd the red-haired man, spite of all."

"How under heaven can you know that?" demanded Harry, in great surprise.

"Know more than that," confessed Dick, turning on his heel to leave. "Hope it won't git you into trouble, but I'm afraid it will."

Dick walked away after delivering this oracular sentence, but turned to add:

"Jist you keep your eye skinned, Mr. Spencer. There'll be the devil to pay if you ain't sharp as a new razor. Can't say no more. You've got the cards. Take keer how you shuffle them."

Harry stood for minutes in deep wonder as to what lay behind all this mysterious warning.

We will precede Dick in his visit to the young lady whose directions he had thus obtained.

Miss Andrews lived in a fine mansion on Spruce street—the residence of her father, a prosperous merchant. The house was beautifully furnished, and the many choice pictures on its walls testified to its taste as well as to the wealth of its inmates.

Dick had been preceded in another manner, unobserved by him. For the gentleman who was so recently conversing with Miss Andrews in the parlor was no other than he whom the boy had lately

followed, and in pursuit of whom he had been so signally discomfited.

Mr. Andrew Williamson, the gentleman in question, was a tall, rather stout person, handsome in face, a full brown mustache shading his well-formed mouth, while his eyes were small, dark and somewhat shifting in expression.

He stood grasping a chair with a hand that closed on the wood as if it would crush it.

Opposite him Miss Andrews sat easily on a sofa, a little tinge of amusement on her face.

"Now, do be seated, Mr. Williamson," she insisted. "You will certainly hurt my poor chair if you close your fingers upon it in that energetic fashion."

"And you did not mean a word you have said?" he asked, releasing the chair he had been unconsciously grasping. "It is only some of your humor?"

"My humor!" she replied, holding up her hands in affected horror. "That is the first time I have been accused of anything so unfashionable."

"You are disposed to be witty, at my expense," with a darkening look upon his face.

"At your expense?" with a rippling smile. "As if a gentleman of acknowledged wit, like Mr. Williamson, could not defend himself against my poor assaults!"

"There are some antagonists whom we dare not draw our weapons against."

"Oh, do not spare me, sir. If it comes to a contest of wits I shall certainly have no mercy upon you."

"I believe you," he replied, as if he had had plenty demonstration of the fact. "But, for mercy's sake, Miss Andrews, do be serious now. I hardly expected to be answered in that fashion."

"I hope you do not wish to add to your other duties that of regulator of the fashion of my answers?" she suggested, sarcastically.

He flung himself gloomily into a chair.

"Perhaps I have offended you in some way. Or perhaps the manly charms of your devoted music-teacher may have thrown all my poor claims into the shade."

"Will you please explain what you mean, sir?" she haughtily asked, rising with a grand sweep from her seat.

"I hardly think an explanation necessary," he replied. "You know perfectly well that I have good reason for what I say."

"I know this perfectly well, sir," she answered, "that my gentlemen friends are not in the habit of insulting me, and that I am very little inclined to submit to insult. I think there is no occasion for us to continue this conversation."

She was moving like an offended queen toward the door when she was arrested by his next words.

"You know I have no thought of insulting you; and you know as well that I have some right to be offended at—"

"At what, sir?"

"Shall I call it flirtation? Will you please explain which of us, I or the music-teacher, is the one whom you are pleased to flirt with?"

His tone showed that he was too indignant to consider how far he might be injuring himself by these words.

"I hardly think that Mr. Spencer will ever have reason to accuse me of flirtation," she replied, with a fierce glance at the speaker.

"Do you know who Harry Spencer is?" he demanded, growing cool as she grew excited.

"I know that he is a gentleman."

"There is something besides polite behavior required to make a gentleman."

"As what, for instance?"

"As birth, for instance."

"Oh! Then he is of no family?"

"It would be difficult for him to tell. If you should like to know just ask him who was his father."

"And what answer would I be likely to get to such an impertinent question?"

"I should like to know myself how he would answer," and he uttered, with a constrained laugh, "I am afraid it would puzzle him to tell you. There is a little mystery connected with his birth which Harry Spencer would scarcely care to be forced to explain."

She seated herself, or, rather, dropped into a chair, looking up at him with scared eyes.

"But a truce to all this," he continued; "I do not wish to injure the man, and am sorry that I said anything about him. I am in no serious fear of your caring too much for a man who, for all we know, may wear the bar sinister upon his shield."

"Will you be kind enough to change the subject?" with a flush of crimson on her cheek.

"If you will but let me return to our former subject. If I have not offended you too deeply in the interim."

"Perhaps you had best not recall your offenses," she answered, with flashing eyes.

"Now you are angry, Helen. I am sorry, indeed I am, that I have no better control over myself. Jealousy has made a fool of me, as of better men. Will you not forgive the fault which love counsels? Will you not—"

He paused, as she turned away with what he seemed to think a contemptuous gesture. He was mistaken in this; it was a step outside the door which had attracted her. She was agitated as she rose to answer a knock upon the door.

"There is a young gentleman out here wishes to see you a minute, Miss Helen," the servant explained.

"You will excuse me, Mr. Williamson?"

"Certainly," with a smile that grew deep and subtle as the door closed upon her.

"I have a fancy that I have checkmated Spencer. She is but a fluttering bird, and I know well where her nest will be."

Helen had walked quickly to the room where her visitor was awaiting her. With surprise she saw the shrewd face of Dick Darling.

"Do you wish to see me?"

"Well, that's about what brung me here," he answered, stretching himself out in a chair. "Get a minute's worth of bizness."

"Very well, sir. My time is limited."

"So is mine. You never saw a chap whose time was as limited as this identical individual."

"What do you wish with me?" she demanded impatiently.

"Does it come back to your recollection that you nodded to a certain person, say about Eleven and Chestnut, and, to wit, at two o'clock this afternoon?"

"I remember doing so," she answered, after a moment's thought.

"That's jest to the mark," declared Dick, excitedly. "I want the name of that certain person. Likewise where he hangs out. Moreover, who he is."

Dick seemed quite proud of his lawyer-like way of putting it. He was slightly taken aback, however, by her reply.

"Is that all?"

"That's all!"

"Then I decline to give you any information in regard to that certain person," with an involuntary smile at Dick's manner.

"You ain't goin' back on me that way?"

"I believe you said that was all your business?"

"About all," resignedly. "All I've got to say is that you're harboring a rascal. Harboring's jist the word, miss. A reg'lar out-an'-outer of a rogue."

"You have nothing more to say?"

"I think I've said 'bout enough," rising and walking toward the door.

Despite her indignation she could not help laughing as he turned his back, at the peculiar aspect of his new coat.

Somewhat emboldened by this, Dick turned and added:

"Hope you won't take it ag'in me, miss. Jist take this last shot. If you know this chap, drop him like a hot potato, and you'll git off without burnt fingers."

Instead of returning to the parlor Helen went slowly to her own room, sending her excuses to Mr. Williamson by a servant. She wished time to reflect upon the two strange charges she had just heard.

CHAPTER VII.

THE LUCY'S TWIN SISTER.

NED HOGAN, back from his visit to Chester, is again seated behind his favorite meerschaum in the room where we first met him.

Stretching himself out easily he takes the pipe from his lips and lays it temporarily upon the table, while his hand goes on an exploring expedition into his pocket.

"I don't know that I've got an ounce of proof positive," he muttered as he drew from its receptacle a well-thumbed letter. "Tracked him to Chester well enough. Seen his interview with the red-haired chap, too. That's correct as far as it goes, but how do I know but this is a sell?"

He opened the letter and again read it. After the address it read as follows:

"If you would gain a clew to that mysterious gang of counterfeiters, who have been setting the detectives at defiance, you will follow these directions. There will, two days from the date of this letter, put into the port of Chester a small schooner called the Lucy. She belongs to the gang in question, and will leave there one of her officers, a red-haired, thin faced man. She will also land certain materials of the counterfeiters, with the purpose of continuing their operations in that locality. A young man named Harry Spencer, of 1084 North Eleventh street, is connected with the gang. If you want to discover their movements you had best shadow him, for he will go at once to Chester and have an interview with the red-headed man referred to. If you wish to learn more, you will find in his house a supply of counterfeit bank-notes, and also information which may put you on the track of his confederates. A FRIEND."

"A friend to who, that's the mystery. Sartin he's no friend to Spencer. He mought want to hurt him. It's true things come out just as he says. But then, there's nothing to show that the schooner, or Mr. Redhead, had anything to do with the gang. And it sounds like a sell on me about the counterfeiters in Spencer's house. Don't like to make a false move. Hope Harris will track his man and the Lucy's cargo into some port of entry. I'm curious about that schooner. May-be Dick may fetch her."

He had hardly thought this ere the person named entered the room, with his usual free-and-easy air. Hogan looked at him in surprise.

"Well, I'll be swigged!" he exclaimed, "if the boy ain't changed his skin. Who the blazes melted you and poured you into them clothes? And what's happened to the back of your coat?"

"If you didn't ax so many questions in one monthful I mought answer them more categorically," and Dick seated himself with an air as if he felt that word to be a regular stunner. "The back of my coat somehow seems to take folks' eyes."

"It's such a splittin' tight fit," explained Hogan. "Was down at the menagerie, and tried a back somerset over an elephant's back. Went over and didn't touch a hair. But it were a leetle too much of a strain on my new raglan."

"Maybe it was some such lie as that swelled you out and busted your outfit," suggested Hogan, resuming his pipe. "Been along the wharves?"

"I hev," quietly.

"Seen anything?"
 "Bout a couple of ounces or so."
 "What sort?"
 "Seen the Lucy!" proudly. "Jist as sure as cheese is made of sour milk."

"Hullo, boy! Now you're goin' to take an extra split in your coat, sure."

"Ain't a word of lie in it," assured Dick, producing a stamp of a cigar from his pocket. "S'pose that's what you're hintin' at. Guv us a light. Can't talk biz'n's 'cept I've got a smell of the weed."

Dick was a comical object as he leaned back, puffing vigorously at his half-smoked cigar, his small, keen boy's face shrouded in smoke, his curly hair struggling in absolute defiance of combs, and his new attire clinging as closely to his limbs as if he had been forced into his clothes by a pile-driver. The tenderness of his pinned-up coat forced him into unusual carefulness and deliberation of movement.

"There. That's comfort," he declared, resignedly, after he had sent a small cloud of smoke to the ceiling. "Now I can talk categorically. I see'd the Lucy. She's changed her coat, though, and dropped her name. It's the Molly now."

"The Molly, hey! Sure of that, Dick?" asked Hogan, with great interest.

"Sure? Ax me if I'm sure that this is my own nose. Did I ever say anything categor—"

"Stop right there, boy. You'll choke sure if that big word gets sideways in your throat."

"Anyhow I see'd the Lucy and I see'd the Molly, and they're twin sisters, only the Lucy wore a black dress with a red ribbon, and the Molly takes to blue. Can't run no sich transmogrification down Dick Darling's throat."

"Where does she lie?"

"At Poplar street wharf."

"All right, boy. I'll pay my respects to that newly-christened young lady," promised Hogan.

"S'pect to make anything out of her?" queried Dick.

"She belongs to the gang, Dick. She'll bear watching."

"And do you s'pose this gang is goin' to sell themselves out as cheap as that? It's my notion there's some deeper game in that letter."

"It may have come from some one who is turning traitor to the counterfeiters."

"It didn't do nothin' of the sort," protested Dick, positively. "The feller that wrote that letter knowed he'd put you on the track of the Lucy, and wanted to throw you off ag'in. He weren't no traitor, then, and he's got some game you don't see. I'll bet a cow he's tryin' to hurt Mr. Spencer."

"I have thought of that," admitted Hogan. "Wish I had took hold of the red-haired man."

"Don't you do it," expostulated Dick, rising. "It'll pay best to watch him. I'll go a peanut 'gainst a per-sunmons that Chester biz'n's is only a blind."

"You're a shrewd inn, Dick."

"I kin see a hole through a ladder. I'm goin' down now to see the chap as sold me this coat, and sold me wuss than the coat. I've a notion to guv him a piece of my mind."

"Good-by, Dick. Draw it mild, my boy. It's all in the way of business, you know."

Dick walked leisurely out, saying to himself:

"You're a smart chap, Ned Hogan, but you won't catch these birds in your spring-trap. And them Government detectives ain't as near the game as you! I'm goin' for them makers of the queer and slippers of the sly, I am. Bet I make Rome howl afore I git through with them!"

He took from his pocket the torn envelope he had before used, and looked through it at the sun. He then replaced it in his pocket with an air of great satisfaction.

"That's the sauce for their mutton," he said, confidently.

Ten minutes afterward Dick burst into old Sol's clothing establishment with the air of a boy that meant business. He was arrested in his object, however, by an unexpected incident.

The Jew was engaged in earnest conversation with a gentlemanly-dressed person. They both looked round at Dick's abrupt entrance, and he saw to his utter surprise, that this gentleman was no other than the man whom he had so unsuccessfully tracked.

He had also overheard something interesting.

"I put it in a place," Sol had declared, "where a child's eye couldn't miss it. They'll take him in the fact."

"Look here, old Sol Sly," cried out Dick, anxious to appear not to have noticed these words, "do you call this a coat to sell to a gentleman of my standin' in a city?" He turned round to submit his back to inspection.

"I must be going now," remarked Mr. Williamson, with only a casual glance at the boy. "You will need the things round to my house?"

"Certainly," answered the Jew, in a tone that seemed to Dick somewhat nervous.

"That's a blind," thought Dick to himself.

"And now, my dear young friend, what can I do for you to-day?" demanded Sol, returning from the door.

"That's a high old cove to be callin' on you, old feller. I've see'd him often, but never knowed his name. What do you call him?"

"Mr. Williamson," answered Sol, quietly.

"In biz'n's?" asked Dick, "or is he only a bu'stin' 'nigger?"

"He has an office at Fourth and Walnut. But what does my young friend want to day?"

"Got more than I s'pected," said Dick to himself. "Guv me a let me come on you."

"S'ee take an observation of that coat," offering

himself for inspection. "Imagine to yourself what would happen if the pins should let go their hold."

"You have been doing something to that coat," asseverated Sol.

"Of course I have," retorted Dick. "I've been bu'stin' it."

"It's your own fault. I told you the coat was too tight, and was a trifle tender in the seams."

"Is that the first lie you ever told?" asked Dick, sarcastically. "Cause if it is you take to it as nat'ral as a duck to water. But if you calkerlate to shet up my eye, and then choke me off with that kind of logic, you're barkin' up the wrong tree, that's all."

"You've got eyes of your own," avowed Sol, decidedly. "I don't find eyes and clothing both for customers."

"You're jist an infernal lying, cheating, blasted old sockdologer!" and Dick spoke excitedly. "And if you don't trade back my old ulster I'll bu'st your b'lier quicker than a hen kin crow."

He flung off the coat, and began to roll up his sleeves as if he meant work.

"It is only the seam that has ripped," plead Sol, nervously. "That can easily be sewed up."

"Ain't takin' in plain sewing for a living. Guv me my own coat back, an' you kin stitch up your own rippin's."

The Jew seemed disposed to accommodate Dick, or to be a little afraid of him, and began to show him other articles of apparel. Then ensued a scene of dickering which the reader will forgive our troubling him with. It ended in Dick's procuring another coat several degrees further gone than the one he had brought back, but having the advantage of being a much looser fit.

"Guess I'm spruce now," and Dick made a bee-line for Fourth and Walnut. "Want to find out instanter if Sol told the truth. If I kin git on this man's track it's better than gettin' a new coat."

His search was not a long one. In one of the buildings, that seemed overflowing with office-renting tenants, he soon discovered a door having on it a sign to this effect:

"ANDREW WILLIAMSON, Attorney-at-Law."

"That's a good day's work," thought Dick. "Guess I've druv more than one nail to the head. Best go home now and see what's the chance for grub."

And he ended a hard day's work with a not very luxurious supper.

CHAPTER VIII. HARRY SPENCER'S VISITORS.

"Now don't nobody bother me fur an hour, more or less," commanded Dick Darling, letting himself down gingerly into a chair that was doing its best to maintain a dignified position on three legs.

Before him was a table of the most venerable aspect, on which he had carefully deposited a sheet of paper and a bottle of ink.

"What are you up to now?" demanded a woman, who was bustling about the room. "You are always after some nonsense."

"I guess the feller as gits this dokymnt won't call it nonsense," returned Dick, with much dignity. "I'm goin' to let out a little of my eddication, and I hope he'll only enjoy it."

"Going to write a letter, Dick?"

"You've hit it there, Aunt Sally. I don't do much that way. But it's me fur all that."

Dick dipped his pen into the inkstand and spread himself over for work. Squaring his elbows, and bending over the paper till it seemed as if he was going to trace the characters with his nose, he began to write, his tongue following every movement of the pen.

It was no light labor he had undertaken, to judge by the immense pains he expended upon every word, and the air of triumph with which he finished every satisfactory sentence.

"How do you spell counterfeit?" he asked, appealing to his aunt.

"I don't spell it at all," with a vigorous movement across the room.

"Dunno how, I s'pose," sarcastically. "Guess I'll have to wrastle with it myself. 'C-o-u-n-t,' count, 'h-e-r,' her, 'f-e-e-t,' feet, counterfeit. Calkerlate that's 'bout it. Didn't know, though, it had anything to do with counting people's feet."

He traveled on half-way down the sheet, finishing with a grand flourish over the signature, "Richard Darling," leaning back and complacently regarding his work.

"Wonder if he'll understand it? Maybe I'd best put it Dick."

"Got Esq after it?" asked his aunt.

"Ain't puttin' on no 'ristocratic airs. But he'll be 'stonished enough 'bout this letter without any side highfalutin's."

Dick, with some little difficulty, read the letter over to himself.

It ran somewhat in this vein:

"DEER SUR:

"S'pected to got a purtunity to run across you, but reckon I best rite. Ther's blazes to pay, so mind yer l. Ther's them arter you as will make things lively. You've an enemy, sur. Can't say no more; but jist hunt your hous' fur a bunch of counterfeit. Some chap's been slippin' the sly on you. Ther's offesurs on yer track. Burn the counterfeets quicker'n lightning, or ther'll be thunder to pay."

"RICHARD DARLING."

"He's dumb as all blazes if he don't take that in. Wouldn't Ned Hogan howl if he knowed what I'm at! Guess I'll put in. Burn this instanter. Mought sell the pass on me."

Dick sealed his letter and carefully directed it.

"Got a two-center stamp, aunt Sally?" he asked.

"If you don't quit bothering me, I'll put a handle stamp on the back of your neck," and the bustling woman looked savagely at him.

"Guess I'll have to lay out for one at the post-cary's shop," leaving the house with his usual independent air.

We must follow his letter to its destination in the hands of Mr. Harry Spencer, to whom it was directed.

"I do not know what could have kept Helen from her lesson," he says, gloomily, rising from his chair, and pacing the floor with a discontented air. "She never missed before, and she surely should have sent some explanation. It is hardly customary, however, for scholars to excuse themselves of their music teachers for loss of a lesson. She's getting too impatient."

His rapid walk was brought to a close by a quick ring at the door-bell.

"Can this be my missing pupil now?" he murmured, with a glad expression. "Yet this is not her day. And it sounds more like the postman's ring."

It proved to be the postman, with Dick's letter. He looked at it curiously, from side to side, not knowing quite what to make of the address.

"This is not what you would call a cultivated hand," he remarked, as he tore open the envelope. "Who can my new correspondent be?"

With a look of utter bewilderment he read the epistle, which task was not very easily accomplished. Dick's writing being as original as his spelling.

"Slippin' the sly. That sounds like slang, and never could understand slang; and what under the sun does 'count-her-feet' mean? Whose feet wonder, and who is to do the counting? 'Richard Darling!' Richard—oh, Dick! I have it now. It is one of Dick's mysterious warnings. It is a warning there is not something in it about red-headed men. Yet, Dick was right about the red hair. There may be something here worth attending to, if I could get the hang of this odd epistle."

He again intently perused it.

"Does he mean counterfeit?" he asked doubtfully.

"Am I to understand that some enemy has hid counterfeit money in my house for the purpose of getting me into trouble? Perhaps I had better search it."

He was prevented from doing so by another ring at the bell. Thrusting Dick's letter into his pocket, he waited impatiently to see who it was.

The parlor door opened, and in walked his missing pupil, a demure look upon her face.

If she had felt any doubt as to the sentimentality of her teacher toward her, the look of sudden gladness that beamed upon his face would have taught her that he was becoming dangerously fond of the scholar.

She advanced with a quiet, dignified air.

"I was just thinking of you," was his welcome.

"Shall we proceed with our lesson to-day?"

"No, sir."

"But you have missed a lesson."

"I am afraid I shall have to miss others, Mr. Spencer. Certain circumstances render it inadvisable that my lessons should be continued for the present."

He looked up with quick surprise and alarm.

"Why, Helen—Miss Andrews—" he said, quickly.

"What can have happened? Have I offended?"

"Not at all, sir. There are other reasons, which you will please excuse my mentioning for the present. The lessons have been very instructive to me."

"And pleasant?" he asked, sinking, with a start, into a seat.

"Very pleasant."

"Yet we have not gone over our lesson of 'Love Waits,'" he went on, with a feeble attempt at banter. "Shall we not, at least, have one piece of exercise?"

"Not 'Love Waits,'" she replied.

"Let it be this, then," he exclaimed, turning quickly over his music.

She bent over the thick pile, anxious to see what song he was looking. Their faces came close together; her breath moved his chestnut hair, his hand turned the music more slowly.

The situation had become decidedly pleasant to him. His hand lingered. He lifted his eyes to hers.

"In what have I offended?" came in a whispering tone from his lips.

"In nothing," she replied. "The offense rests with others."

"There is offense, then?" he quickly asked.

She drew back a little before replying. Whether she may have intended to say, she was prevented by a new ringing at the bell.

He stood a moment, looking toward the door, as if he could have annihilated the person interrupting. Heavy steps followed, as if more than one man had entered. But they passed the door of the parlor, and seemed to go toward the rear of the house.

"They must be friends of my housekeeper," he remarked, paying no further attention to the visitors.

Miss Andrews stood in a quiet, observant attitude, seemingly not quite satisfied with her position, but as if in doubt just how to act.

He made no further allusion to her last warning, but commenced to again seek through the music.

Several minutes of silence thus passed, during which the footsteps of the visitors were heard at intervals.

"Here it is," he said. "She is so near."

"And yet so far," she sang.

"Not so far," taking a quick step toward her.

At this moment the footsteps again approached the door. It was quickly opened, and two rather roughly-dressed men entered.

One of them, whose face Harry remembered having seen somewhere lately, approached him, saying: "Excuse me, miss; I have a bit of business with this gentleman."

"I shall go, then," nervous at some indefinite threat in his tone.

"Do not go," Harry quickly exclaimed. "I have no private business with these men. What do you wish, sir?"

"Do you recognize this package?" holding out a small parcel.

"I do not."

"Perhaps you may now," suggested Ned Hogan, for it was he.

He quickly opened the parcel, and displayed a considerable number of bank-notes.

"Well, sir?" asked Harry, questioningly.

"That is well played, Mr. Spencer. These came out of your private desk. They are counterfeits, of the kind that the city has been flooded with lately, and—"

"And what?"

"It is my duty to arrest you as an accomplice of these counterfeiters."

There was an appealing cry. Harry looked up, to find the eyes of Miss Andrews fixed with trembling solicitude upon his, to feel her hand laid protectingly upon his shoulder.

CHAPTER IX.

DICK GIVES THE DETECTIVES A COMMISSION.

The two government detectives are seated in their room at the hotel.

Or not both seated just now, for Frazer is pacing the floor in a restless, discontented manner. Jack Bounce, however, has established his large frame in one of his easy attitudes, and is coolly peeling an orange, while he looks up in a questioning manner at his associate.

"Well, we have tried hiding our heads and waiting for developments," declared Frazer, sarcastically. "I do not find developments opening up very fast."

"Wait, my boy," responded Jack. "The man that can wait longest wins. Have an orange?"

"No," impatiently. "I have matters of more importance to think of just now than eating oranges."

"Have you? I haven't," responded Jack, as he threw back the golden rind of the fruit and applied its luscious interior to his lips.

"I'll be shot if you ain't enough to make a saint swear!" cried Will, throwing himself angrily into a chair. "Do you think these fellows we are after will come to our room and give themselves up?"

"Softly, softly, my boy," taking a morsel of his orange between each sentence. "Maybe you think, Will, that flirting about like a fly on a hot shovel is going to do some great good. Did you ever gain anything by getting out of temper?"

"Yes. I gain some relief to my feelings. I don't like to see Pinkerton get the inside track of us. There's that fellow, Hogan, has just arrested a man as one of the gang. That's the work we ought to be at."

"That is so!" admitted Jack, thoughtfully. "He is to have a hearing this morning. We must drop round and take a squint at the evidence. I've a notion there's nothing in it."

"Hogan is no fool," averred Will. "He does not go it blind. How about that boy you invested ten dollars in? Looks as if he had sold you."

"Maybe he has. Time will tell," responded Jack, wiping his fingers.

"I hope he don't go blowing about the streets how he has humbugged a brace of Uncle Sam's detectives. That would be too pleasant."

"Nary a blow," came from a youthful voice at the open door.

The officers turned quickly to see the small figure of Dick Darling, who entered the room with the most free-and-easy air imaginable.

He was dressed much more sprucely than when they had seen him last, but there was the same expression on his face.

"Been investin'?" he explained, turning himself around with a proud air for their inspection. "How's that for an out-and-outer rig?"

"Rich and tasty," pronounced Jack, admiring the graceful figure of the boy much more than his attire.

"And a fiver done it all! I'm guns on a bargain," and Dick at once installed himself in a chair, which he tipped up on its two hind legs.

"And what have you done to earn your money yet?" cried Frazer.

"Now you want to git clean to the bottom of the box afore I've opened the lid. Ain't got much in my box yit, anyhow. And that little I'm a-spreadin' out."

"I suppose you will spread it out very thin."

"Allers try to make my butter cover my bread. S'pose you've heard what Ned Hogan's gone and did?"

"Oh, yes."

"Thinks he's struck it," continued Dick. "Don't run that way in my head. Harry Spencer's one of my particular friends. He don't know no more 'bout counterfeits than a cow knows 'bout 'rithmetic."

"What is the evidence against him?" asked Jack, curiously.

"They've found a bunch of counterfeits in one of his drawers. That looks blue; only it's too 'riley in the season fur blue birds. There's some deviltry back of it all. They've been put there by somebody that's down on him. And the chap that put them there, that's the chap we want."

The two officers were looking with deeply-interested eyes at Dick as he slowly laid out this programme of his opinions.

"The boy may be right," admitted Will. "We

must be at this hearing, Jack, and if it looks as he says, the next thing will be to spy out Spencer's enemies."

"Let Dick unload his bag first," answered Jack. "He knows more yet."

"Come round here on biz," declared Dick, importantly. "Firstly, want you to write me a letter."

"Certainly, Dick, we will do that."

"Tain't 'cause I can't do it myself. But somehow I ain't extra at flingin' the pen. And then my spellin' ain't jist 'cording to Webster. Now I want this in one of your swingin', cavortin' business hands, so the chap that gits it'll think he's got a million-dollar job, and will let hisself loose on an answer."

"All right," declared Jack, laughing, as he seated himself at a table and drew up pens and paper.

"Strike in. I'll make a document you may be proud of."

"Correck! That's what I'm arter! Jist pull out this way:— Got down Philadelfy? And the date?"

"Yes."

"And Dear Sir?"

"Dear Sir," said Jack, writing.

"Hold your hosses there a minit," and Dick scratched his head. "Want to get hold of the butt-end of my idears. Let's see—a million-dollar job, and half to the lawyer? No. That's too thin."

"I should call that too thick."

"S'pose you strike it somehow this way. You kin put in the fancy work yourself. I'll jist lay out the rough stock."

"All right. I'll do the poetry."

"Sure you got down Dear Sir?"

"Go ahead. That's part of the fancy work."

"Well, then. 'I've got a big contract for a lawyer, which I think is 'bout your size and weight.' Maybe you'd best say, 'rushin' big contract.'"

"We won't rush in anything," demurred Jack, waiting for a new paragraph.

"Slide on then. 'There's 'bout a hundred thousand in it, and fine pickin's for a lawyer. If you're in the market for such a job, let's hear from you instanter, if not sooner. 'Point an interview.' Got that in shape?"

"Yes, with amendments."

"Well, let me see what next. Oh! yes. I've got it. 'Yours 'spectfully, Richard Darling.'"

"That's short and sweet."

"All I want's an answer. Calkerlate that'll wake him up."

"But what under heaven are you after?" demanded Will Frazer.

"After a divvy! Got my eye on some fun. Bet I stir up things kinder lively afore I'm through! Can't blow on my game jist yet."

"But what directions shall I give your legal friend to write to?" asked Jack.

"Philadelfy's enough. If I giv him my mansion on Walnut street, he mought call, and that ain't in the game. Want an answer by mail."

"But how are you going to get it? Philadelphia is a sizable place, with a good many people in it."

"Why, bless your eyes," retorted Dick, laughing, "all the letter-carriers know me like beans. Carry on a 'stensive cor'spondence, I do! Of'en git letters from China and Injy, and sich like foreign parts. Can't go 'long the streets without them droppin' cor'spondence into my hands."

"Your business must be a good thing for the post-office."

"Reckon 'tain't bad. Takes a small fortun' to keep me in stamps."

"Oh, you are a writer too, then, as well as a recipient of letters?"

"Yes; rattle them off amazin'. That is, when I grease my elbows and square myself for work. Don't think nothin' of a dozen at a batch. Ain't much at puttin' in poetry and hifalutin' though. That's why I come to you."

"How shall this be directed?" asked Jack, curiously, as he closed and sealed the envelope.

"Pass it over; I'll tend to that part of the job. Allers do my own finishin', you see. Don't like to put you to no more trouble."

"It's no trouble at all."

"Feared it is," said Dick, putting the undirected letter in his pocket. "Won't ax you to do no more jist now."

It was very evident he did not intend that they should know the destination of his epistle.

"Hope you don't think I've been gettin' money under false pretenses?" seating himself coolly on a corner of the table.

"I don't see that you've done much to earn it yet," answered Will Frazer.

"Well, then, I'll put you on ten dollars' worth of a lay. There's a chap as keeps an old clo' store on South street, which there mought be some fun in keepin' an eye on."

"For what purpose?"

"That's jist what I don't know; but I've a lively noshin that there's a screw loose 'bout that 'spected individual."

"Who is he?"

"It's Solomon Sly, or old Sol, as I generally call the dried-up cove. He hangs out at 479 South. Sells mixtures, sich as trowsers, shoes, and hair-pins. Wants watchin' mighty bad."

"Then why don't you watch him?" asked Jack.

"Got other biz on hand," was Dick's rejoinder. "Can't split myself and be in two places at wunst. Spottin' higher game, I am. But, while a feller's watchin' the eagles, the night-hawks can't be left out."

"Then you choose to watch the eagles, and leave us the hawks?"

"Jist so," declared Dick, independently. "Don't find eagles for other folks' plucking. You've got a dozen eyes to my two, and Sol Sly wants watchin'."

That's the long and the short of it. Give you ten

dollars' worth. If you don't choose to go for it, don't say I ain't paid my debts. Guess I'll go and see Ned Hogan."

And cramming his hat close down on his head, Dick made a bee-line for the door, as if he had said his last, and did not care to waste words.

"Hold hard, there, you blasted, quick-motoned, stiff-headed, young villain!" cried Jack, laughing. "You're the most mysterious reprobate I ever ran across. Is there any game in this Sly?"

"Yes; deep game, if I ain't sold," answered Dick from the door.

"Very well; we will shadow him."

"All O. K. Don't let a skeeter by without the pass-word. Reckon you'll strike it. Good-day."

"Portant bizness calls, and I must obey."

And Dick stalked from the room, leaving the two officers choking with laughter.

It was not a half-hour before he had managed to get his letter directed by some disinterested individual, with a handwriting rather an improvement on his own.

It was directed to:

MR. ANDREW WILLIAMSON,
Fourth and Walnut sts.,
City.

Dick haunted the post-office the next day, asking a dozen times if there was any letter for Mr. Richard Darling.

Just before night it came—a voluminous legal envelope.

Dick read the direction eagerly, then deposited the epistle in some inside pocket with an air of supreme satisfaction, and strutted, dignifiedly, out into the full human tide of Chestnut street.

CHAPTER X.

A SOCIAL GLASS.

THE reader must accompany us next up the line of the wharves on the Delaware, with their close array of vessels of all shapes and sizes, from an oyster boat to a huge ship in the India line, from a steam tug to an ocean steamer.

Making our way along the line of open stores devoted to truck in all its branches, we finally reach the vicinity of Poplar street wharf, in the wake of Mr. Ned Hogan, who is walking leisurely along, enjoying his meerschaum and the spring air.

At the wharf in question lies a trim little two-master, a vessel with the tall spars and sharp build of a yacht. She seems to have seen some service, and looks the trimness and neatness which should be the constituents of a well-kept pleasure boat.

Hogan walked quietly down to the wharf, and inspected her with the eye of a sailor. On her stern, in plain letters, was the name Molly.

"That's the craft," he said to himself, as he approached the edge of the wharf overlooking the vessel.

"A neat boat," he added, aloud, leaning easily against a post, and speaking to a man on board.

"Hard to beat," answered the man, a short, thin-faced person, with reddish hair.

"Calculate she ought to be a good goer," continued Ned, blowing a cloud of smoke to windward.

"You can wager your bottom dollar on that," answered the man in a pleased tone. "I fancy she can show her heels to any craft along these wharves."

"Maybe so. I have a keen eye for a good sailer, and she's got the lines. Let's have a closer look."

He sprang lightly on board the boat, and commenced the inspection.

"Used as a yacht?" he asked.

"More for pleasure than profit," confessed the man, rising from the coil of rope on which he had been reclining. "If you want to see a well got up boat, I won't mind showing you through her."

"Much obliged," answered Hogan, puffing away at his meerschaum.

He followed his guide through the interior of the vessel, praising her appointments very liberally.

"I like to get hold of a man that is in love with a fine boat," the red-haired person declared.

"That's me," ejaculated Hogan. "Much obliged, Mr. Turner—he had got the man's name. 'Take something to drink.'"

"It isn't just my hour."

"Oh, a drop won't hurt. Come along. The Molly don't need a ship's husband to look after her."

Mr. Turner needed no great persuasion, but yielded to the warm invitation of Ned. A tavern on the wharf soon enveloped them, and a glass of the most fiery beverage cemented their new acquaintance.

Neither of them seemed inclined to stop at one glass. Seating themselves at a table, they entered into a desultory conversation on all sorts of impersonal subjects, Ned taking care that their talk should be well moistened with whisky.

He was a thoroughly seasoned toper, and the liquor affected him no more than so much water. Not so with Turner. His head seemed quickly to feel the strong potations, and his tongue to grow loosed in consequence.

"Oh, fill up again!" pressed Ned. "I don't meet a good fellow like you every day, and ain't in no hurry to part."

Very little persuasion was needed. Another glass of the liquor overcame the last scruples of Turner, and gave his tongue a suspiciously thick utterance.

"By the way," remarked Hogan, as if the thought had just occurred to him, "the Molly doesn't belong here. I was here a week ago, but nary Molly."

"Just put in a few days back," Turner assured him.

"What port do you hail from, shipmate?"

"From New York last."

"Aha! Come up the river lately?"

"Oh! two or three days ago," taking a sip at his glass.

"Fill up again, man. You are brushing the bottom. Good liquor tastes best from the top of the glass."

"Guess I've took enough," thickly. "Enough! Well, nobody would call you greedy," asserted Hogan, filling his companion's glass again. "Just a thimbleful then."

"I've took quite a fancy to your boat," Hogan said; "saw her last week and thought her a regular clipper."

"Where did you see her last week?" asked Turner, quickly.

"At Chester," in the most matter-of-fact tone. "Bet a shilling you didn't!" his tipsy companion spoke decidedly.

"Yes. She was streaked red then. She's changed her name since from Lucy to Molly."

Turner rose, holding in an uncertain way to his chair.

"I tell you it's a sell you're trying to get on me," and he now spoke angrily.

"Why, bless your blue eyes, comrade," said Hogan, laughing cheerily, "you don't s'pose an old salt can be lumbugged by a streak of paint and a new name? I'd swear to the boat if I saw her in Hong Kong."

"You're a sharp individual—you are," declared Turner, with a tipsy hesitation. "And it's all blamed stuff."

"Come straight up from Chester?" asked Hogan, easily.

"Made a stop at the fishing-place, just above the town, to get some shad," was the reply, quite forgetting that he was acknowledging Hogan's charge.

"Stop there long?"

"An hour maybe. Cap went ashore to see the haunted house, that lays back there in the meadows."

"A haunted house, eh?" with a new influx of interest. "Wish I'd been there. Did you go ashore to see it?"

"I'd sooner run ten miles t'other way," with emphasis.

"An hour in a haunted house! That's fun. Did he see the ghosts?"

"Didn't say ghost to me. You're getting blamed anxious about ghosts."

"Don't know anything I like better than ghosts," declared Hogan, emphatically. "Got a regular passion for them. Did Cap take anything ashore, or bring anything aboard from the haunted house?"

"Oh! a paper parcel. Lunch, I guess, seeing he didn't fetch it back."

"My eyes! that must have been fun; lurching with a party of ghosts," and Hogan again laughed. "I'd like to have seen that."

"I didn't say a blamed word about lurching with ghosts," half-growled Turner, rising. "Don't think I'll stay here to have ghosts rammed down my throat every time I open my mouth."

He walked toward the door with an unsteady step, followed by Hogan.

Reaching the street they noticed a well-dressed man upon the wharf, who was pacing up and down with an impatient tread.

He caught sight of Turner's advance, and hastened toward him.

"This is a sweet picture of affairs," he cried, angrily. "Who has charge of the boat now? Where is Cap. Parker? You have been drinking!"

"Just wetting my whistle with an old friend I knew down South," explained Turner, nervously. "Nothing to hurt."

"The smell of whisky is enough to hurt," and the gentleman spoke hotly. "And you have it in your legs as well as your head. Come aboard at once, sir."

"That's just where I was going," averred Turner, with tipsy dignity.

He turned and waved his hand to Hogan in adieu, winking at him as if to assert his independence of this autocratic gentleman's orders.

Hogan stood and watched them as they stepped aboard the yacht and disappeared in the cabin, the gentleman first casting a keen look around the wharves.

"Dunno whether I got paid for my whisky or not," muttered Hogan, to himself. "Only broke the ice to-day. It don't do to go too fast till you know your ground. Guess I'll stroll up this way again soon, and pay my respects to Mr. Joe Turner. He's not extra talkative, drunk or sober."

He was about to turn down the street when his quick eye caught sight of something that arrested his attention. It was no more than a boy's head, which peered up above the top of a thick post on the wharf, the eyes fixed searchingly on the Molly.

Hogan looked at him a moment with a dawning smile. He then walked easily round and behind the lad, moving cautiously up toward him. The deeply-absorbed boy seemed to have no knowledge of his presence. He still stood, with his eyes on a level with the top of the post, when Hogan got near enough to him to give him a hearty slap on the shoulder, saying:

"Hey, Dick! Catching musketoes? Or maybe waiting for a bite?"

"I don't know as I am cheating Ned Hogan out of any of his," replied Dick, without a sign of surprise, or a movement of his head.

"I might as well have stirred up the post with my fingers," muttered Hogan. "You saw me, you rascal?"

"Of course. But you weren't my game."

"Well, I'll swear if he ain't a detective in grain," announced Hogan, admiringly. "What is your lay now, Dick?"

"You seen that man with old red-head?"

"Certainly I did."

"Well, he's my oyster."

"Have you been mulling after him?" asked Hogan, with great amusement. "You've got enough mud on the end of your nose to plant potatoes in."

"Was layin' low, and keepin' shady," explained Dick, polishing the organ in question with the back of his hand. "I was flung once by that chap. Had my eye-teeth cut then. If he flings me ag'in you kin buy me cheap."

"Who is he, Dick?" asked Hogan, curiously.

"That's what I want to know," averred Dick. "He's one of your high-toned coves. I'm arter him like a chimley-swaller arter a fly. You git! You're too big and clumsy for this lay. Been 'vestigatin' red-head, ain't you?"

"A trifle."

"Hit any snags?"

"Only found that the Lucy stopped at the fisheries above Chester, and the captain went ashore to visit a haunted house there. There's nothing in that. Ghosts ain't our game."

"Dunno," murmured Dick, dubiously. "There's ghosts sometimes that wear whole skins. Now git, Hogan. Your room's better than your company jist now. I'm goin' to sarcumvent that pair, or bu at a-tryin'."

"Bring word what luck you have," ordered Hogan, walking away.

"Ay, ay, I'll post you! Fur as I see fit," was his sub-voce answer.

A minute afterward the gentleman looked out from the cabin door. There was nothing visible with more life than the post which had concealed Dick, except the distant form of Ned Hogan, now rapidly walking away.

Dick was ensconced behind another post near the edge of the wharf. He held in his hand the letter he had received from Mr. Williamson. He next produced the envelope of which he took such frequent inspection. It was addressed to

"MR. EDWARD HOGAN,
Fifth and Race Sts.,
Phila., Pa."

He laid the two envelopes together and examined them closely. Finally they went together into his pockets, as he said, with a satisfied air.

"I'll bet my new suit 'gainst a doll-baby's spring hat that the same man writ them both. Tryin' to change his writin' but writin' ain't easy changed. If I ain't gallopin' on a clean track then nobody never sold peanuts for a livin'."

Dick's next evolutions were of the stealthiest character. Creeping with cat-like movement to the edge of the wharf he clambered quietly over the wharf-log and let himself down the vertical side as easily and noiselessly as if he had been on level ground.

One of the cabin windows of the Molly was open, and this was Dick's objective point. By some acrobatic system of wriggling and writhing he established himself on the stern of the Molly, clinging to the rudder-post with a death-grip, and in such a way that his eyes just reached to the bottom of the open window.

Lifting himself a little with both hands he got one glimpse of the interior of the cabin, the most important feature of which was the forms of the two men seated on each side of a center table, and engaged in conversation. Dick let himself down again, out of sight, but with every nerve strained to hear.

"Mind your eyes now, Williamson and brick-top. If you talk too much some chap of my size mought git a ring in your nose."

CHAPTER XI.

MOTHER AND DAUGHTER.

We have seen the parlor of Mr. Andrews' residence, on the occasion of Mr. Williamson's somewhat curt dismissal. We will now betake ourselves to the sitting-room of the same mansion.

It is an elegantly appointed apartment, furnished in the richest taste. Several valuable pictures adorn the walls, and about the room are scattered costly articles of ornament. It has altogether that home-like aspect of a room whose adornment has grown out of the needs and tastes of its inmates.

A deep bay window occupies the lower end of the room. Here, seated in an easy-chair, her feet resting on a tall footstool, reclines a matronly lady. She has once been very pretty, and still wears much of her good looks, though age has broadened the lines of her face, and added a decided look of worldly wisdom.

Opposite her sits, in a small chair, her arm resting on the sill of the open window, a young lady, whose beautiful face seems a *spiritual* copy of that of the matron. They are really mother and daughter—Mrs. Andrews and her daughter Helen.

Mrs. Andrews plays leisurely with her fan, for the day is warm for mid-April, and the sun bathes the face of the window in fervent light.

"Then you did as I wished!" remarked the mother. "You simply dismissed him, without entering into reasons or argument?"

"Yes, mother," with a weary expression; "and I was never so thoroughly disgusted with myself in my life before."

"Why so? The dismissal of a music-teacher is not such a vital matter."

"I don't know," returned Helen, with a quick movement of impatience. "I mismanaged it, I suppose. I know I must have made it look as if I had some personal objection to him. He seemed much hurt."

"Oh, that matters very little," replied Mrs. Andrews. "That will easily mend; he can cure his wounds with a new scholar."

"I am afraid a host of new scholars will not have that effect," and Helen rested her head wearily on the window-sill.

The sunlight struck her soft brown hair, and

played about it like an aureole of brightness. The mother dropped her fan to look admiringly at her. "Do you know, Helen, that you are growing more and more beautiful?" she said, with the air of an artist. "I wish that sunlight effect could only be made perpetual."

Helen drew herself back with a vexed movement. The loosened hair flowed in a wave over her forehead, with a gleam as if it had imprisoned some of the sunlight.

"You cannot help looking beautiful, my dear," added her mother. "But those impatient movements are never very graceful."

"Forgive me," murmured Helen; "I did not mean to annoy you. But I cannot help feeling troubled and out of sorts with myself just now."

"I fear your music lessons were allowed to go on even too long," averred Mrs. Andrews, using her fan rapidly.

"Why so? No one can object to him as a teacher."

"You have been growing entirely too much interested in him. Such a person should be considered as a teacher only—nothing more. I would not have my daughter stoop to waste a second thought on any one so far below her in station."

"He is a gentleman," declared Helen, proudly. "I fear I have not always impressed him as a lady."

"This is ridiculous, child. As if it was of the least importance what he chose to think. I am glad that your connection with him has been broken off. A man not only of the lower classes, but seemingly without known father or mother."

"Who told you that?" demanded Helen, with a quick flush upon her face. "That is the reason, then, that I had to give him up? But I know who told you."

There was a glitter in the young lady's eyes, and her lips were closely shut.

"It does not matter who told me," answered her mother, with dignity. "The only question is as to its truth."

"Excuse me, mother; that is not the question at all. I do not court social disgrace—nor do I fear it, if justice and the opinion of society come in conflict. The real question is as to the spite which has thus sought to injure a deserving young man, by what may be an infamous lie."

"My dear, I am surprised that you should permit yourself to become excited," said Mrs. Andrews, nestling more cosily in her chair, and waving the fan with a long, indolent sweep. "There's nothing more plebeian; and I really object to any animated discussion on the subject of a mere music teacher."

"A mere *man*!" retorted Helen, with some sarcasm. "Yet it is not he who excited me, but our blue-blooded Mr. Williamson. The essence of gentility that runs in the veins of our social nobility should certainly not be tainted with such low vices as lying and spitefulness."

"If it is the truth I can see no crime in telling it," decided Mrs. Andrews, a little roused.

"Truth may be made a vice if told with a spiteful purpose."

"You cling to that word spite, Helen. What possible *spite* can Mr. Williamson bear against this man?"

A slight flush came to Helen's cheek, as she turned her head partly away, as if to look out of the window. She made no answer for a minute, the mother's eyes resting curiously on her ingenuous face.

"Whatever his reasons, the fact remains," responded Helen, with an excited accent. "And I despise him for it! It matters nothing to me if one has the entrée to the best society and the other not. Whatever fortune may have done for them, the fact remains that Mr. Spencer has been born a gentleman, and Mr. Williamson not."

"You are assuming too much now, Helen."

"I am assuming nothing. Suppose it all be true that Williamson says—nay, all that he implies—even then the stubborn fact remains that his base gossip lowers him far more than his birth can possibly lower Mr. Spencer. All that cant of the invisible virtue of aristocratic birth is dying out in modern society. Men are learning to take their neighbors for what they are, not what some absurd social code declares them."

The young lady's voice was a little warm, and she spoke with much energy of accent.

"Well, you are improving, Helen," declared her mother, sarcastically. "I think it was high time that I changed your associations. Yet people generally, even in these democratic days, would hardly care to mix with gentlemen born out of lawful wedlock—people in our set, I mean."

"I fear that if people in our set knew all, they would be still less inclined to associate with Mr. Spencer."

As she spoke Helen had risen and stood, resting one hand on the chair back, her face and the whole pose of her body seeming full of indignant scorn of the verdict of "our set."

Mrs. Andrews lifted her long lashes, indolently, and rested her eyes for a moment in admiration upon the graceful pose of her daughter, full of an unconscious charm that would have stirred the soul of an artist to its depths.

"Knew all?"

"Yes," somewhat curtly.

"There is more, then, to know?"

"Suppose I tell you," and now Helen spoke quickly, and with repressed excitement; "that this young man has sinned beyond redemption—in making an unscrupulous enemy."

"What can you mean?" was the indolent answer.

"I mean that Harry Spencer has been arrested—this very day—in my presence. Arrested for no less a crime than being an accomplice of counterfeiters. The proof was found in his house."

"Why, girl, you take my breath!" exclaimed Mrs. Andrews, starting up from her reclining posture.

"It is all true."

"And you still defend him? Did you expect anything better from one of his sort?"

"I still defend him!" said Helen, seeming to gain the calmness which her mother had lost. "I believe—I know that he is innocent. Therefore I defend him. Justice shall be done. He shall be freed from this false charge. And he loses nothing in my estimation, because he is accused of a crime which he never committed."

"The proofs found in his own house? What evidence is your girlish belief against that? You are letting a childish imagination run away with you now, Helen."

"I know he is the victim of some base plot! I shall never desert him while I believe him innocent!"

"Do you remember about whom you are talking, Helen, or the character of his relations with you?" asked her mother, with much dignity of manner.

"This is only your music-teacher; not your friend and associate. And he seems to have effectually put a bar to any further lessons—unless, indeed, you should desire to take them in his prison cell." Her voice had grown very sarcastic.

"There will be no need of that," Helen returned, quietly.

"And why not? I think he will hardly get bail on such a charge."

"There are strong circumstances in his favor, mother. I am satisfied that the judge will accept bail for him."

"It must be some heavy amount, then. And who is his wealthy friend who will risk much on his honesty?"

"The friend is found. I have directed Mr. Widdin to see that he obtains bail, on the security of my private inheritance."

"Why, child, are you mad?" cried Mrs. Andrews, hotly. "But this is ridiculous. A woman cannot go bail."

"I think my offer, with power of attorney in Mr. Widdin's hands, will be accepted," replied Helen.

"I think, indeed, that Mr. Spencer is already free. I have no fears of his avoiding a trial."

"But for you to take such an action! Without consulting me or your father!" exclaimed the excited and agitated woman.

"Excuse me, mother, I did consult with father. He quite agreed with me. I had no time to see you. And I knew, of course, that you would not agree to what I had determined on doing."

"It was just like your father!" cried Mrs. Andrews, turning her tide of anger from her resolute daughter to the absent husband. "He is full of all sorts of radical and nonsensical ideas, and he has infected you with the same plebeian proclivities."

Mrs. Andrews hurried from the room, not daring to trust herself further under her angry excitement.

"I knew there must be a scene with mother," murmured Helen, sadly. "I am glad the worst of it is over."

CHAPTER XII.

A WATER-RAT.

But what of Dick, whom we left clinging to the rudder-posts of the yacht Molly?

The boy was very quick of hearing, and his acute senses were strained to not miss a word of the important conversation which he hoped to overhear. Yet for the first five minutes the voices of the two men in the cabin were pitched in too low a key for him to catch a connected sentence.

Shifting his position so as to get his right foot on one of the rudder-irons, Dick gained a more comfortable location, and one that brought his ear nearer to the open window.

The voices of the two men, also, grew unconsciously louder as they proceeded with their conversation, Turner's half-tipsy condition interfering with his natural cautiousness.

"Struck his fancy from the start; I could see that," he said, decidedly, "I don't think it was so much the money—though there's mighty few men to whom a pile ain't an object."

"What was it, then?" spoke the deeper tones of Mr. Williamson.

"The mystery. You see, he's been troubled at heart about who his father and mother were. Had a fear of something disgraceful, too. Why, as soon as I broached the matter, his eyes lit up like two stars on a dark sky."

"We will dispense with the poetical part of the subject," put in Mr. Williamson, coldly. "Did you let out anything about the location of the property, or the residence or condition of his parents?"

"Certainly; told the city they lived in, and all that."

"I should be very little surprised if you did. Especially if you let anybody pour liquor into you, as to-day."

"Told him they lived in New Orleans, and were French creoles," protested Turner. "Guess that's far enough off the track. Told him it was out of the question to say a word more till I was sure he was the son."

"And asked him for remembrances of his infancy? And relics, if he had any?" inquired Williamson.

"Now it's comin'," thought Dick. "If I miss a word now, I'd jist better let go my holt, and drown myself for an idiot. Never see'd anything so well primed as I've got them."

His face broadened with a silent laughter that was full of intense enjoyment of the situation.

"He let it out freely enough," replied Turner. "Didn't seem to smell a mouse anywhere. He re-

members well a large stone house, with extensive grounds around it. It was neither city nor country, for there were numbers of houses near, with broad pleasure-grounds around each."

"What was the house like?"

"That he could not well describe. It was something of the old-fashioned style, with stone out-buildings."

"Jist so!" thought Dick, noting these details in his memory. "Dig in, my cove. I'm a-takin' it in."

"Had he any further recollections?"

"Yes. Of a beautiful lady, dressed in blue silk, and wearing a very bright stone in her collar. There was also a tall, handsome gentleman, who fondled and made much of him."

"That's down, brick-top," was Dick's mental comment. "Slide ahead."

"Anything more?"

"Nothing that he could recall. His next recollection is of being very roughly used, and forced to beg on the streets in company with an old crone, who beat him when he failed to bring home money."

"It will be important to learn the name and residence of that crone," asserted Williamson. "Also her description. Did he have any remembrance of this being in Boston?"

"No. The woman must have brought him on to Philadelphia. She probably stole the child for the sake of his fine clothes, and with the purpose of aiding her in her begging operations, and came to Philadelphia to avoid detection."

"Any fool might see that," muttered Dick.

"Bosting, though. Won't do to forgit Bosting."

"And now as to relics of his childhood," suggested Williamson. "These will be most important."

"Sartain sure they will," thought Dick. "Pile in, redhead; let's have your relics."

"His clothes were probably sold by the crone who stole him," Turner went on. "All he had left belonging to his youth was a bronze medal, and a curiously-knit chain attached to it. This he remembers to have had in his childhood."

"Good! We must have that medal."

"I expect to see him again," declared Turner.

"You know of his being arrested on a charge of counterfeiting, and that the alderman has put him under heavy bail?"

"He should have put him in prison," declared Williamson, harshly. "He must have been a fool to accept bail on such a charge. You must see Spencer at once, and try and learn where he keeps the medal and chain."

"I will hunt him up to-day. But understand, I cannot do any pickpocket or burglar work."

"You can't!" thought the listener. "You're mean enough to steal green persimmons and sell them for apricots."

"Get it from him by any lie you can manufacture. If he won't take, find where he keeps it. I am bound to have the Milton estate, and won't be stopped by any slight difficulty."

"Going to play the lost heir?" asked Turner.

"His recollections will be of no use if somebody else has them in advance of him. Probe him again on that subject; he may recall some new points. And the medal will clinch the business. The old woman who stole him will swear black is white if I instruct her to."

"I see," confessed Turner. "You're a blamed shrewd one. The old lady Milton will swallow it all as easy as a cat swallows milk. What a precious son you will make."

"I?" said Williamson, quickly. "No, no, my paternity is too well known. I have my man, though."

"Who?"

"Well, it will soon be no secret. Captain Parker is the man."

"Well, if I ain't holed a precious pair of rascals then whitewash me, that's all!" Dick had to admit, to himself. "Got that whole biz mapped out. But, they're mighty shy of the counterfeit bizness. Bricktop talks as if he weren't in that ring."

Dick's position by this time had grown unbearably unpleasant. He shifted his feet and tried to make himself more comfortable. In doing so his hands slipped, and—the parties in the cabin were suddenly startled by a heavy splash in the water.

Turner ran to the cabin window, and looked out. There was nothing visible, though a circle of wave-rings was spreading in the water from the rudder post outward. Williamson, alarmed lest their conversation should have been overheard, ran on deck and looked warily into the water all around the boat. But there was no object to be seen, and the ring of wavelets was rapidly dying out.

"It is strange," he said. "Something must have fallen from the wharf. Though I cannot see how."

"It must have been a fish jumped," suggested Turner, appearing on deck.

"Fish of that size don't swim in the docks," said Williamson, incredulously. "But whatever it is it has gone to the bottom, so we need not care much. Attend to that matter instantly, Turner, and report to me at once. And mind, let us have no more tipping while this affair is in hand."

"I don't think any fresh water sailor, or salt water either, for that matter, will make a fool of me again easily."

"Don't forget that," said Williamson, as he left the vessel, and walked briskly up the wharf.

"That splash was blamed queer," growled Turner, looking again reflectively into the water.

He shook his head doubtfully as he turned and went below.

At the same moment, from behind a small coasting smack that occupied the opposite side of the dock, there appeared a grinning boy's face, washed clean of the dirt it had lately gathered while rooting behind the post.

"It's jist the biggest fish that you ever see'd," said the boy, with a hearty laugh. "Ought to flung your line over. Mought have cotched him. Bless your eyes, Williamson, there ain't a fish in the Delaware kin swim under water better nor Dick Darling."

Dick crawled up the wharf and stood in the sunlight on the top of the wharf log, the water dripping from him as from a drowned rat.

"Reckon I've giv my new clothes a seasonin'," he said, trying to squeeze some of the superabundant water out of them. "Don't keer how soon it rains now. Can't spile my fixin's."

He got out of that locality, and laid himself out in the sun to dry in a board yard not far distant, removing and spreading out his outer garments till there was little left but his bare skin for the sun to act on.

But, we must leap over a space of time, and present Dick, thoroughly dried, renovated, and remarkably well washed—for him, in a different locality.

It is near the evening of the same day, and in the region of Fourth and Walnut, that we again take up our water-rat, lounging about with his eyes turned toward the door of the building containing Mr. Williamson's office.

An express wagon, loaded with goods, stops in front of the door, and Dick hurries over to that side of the street.

The expressman fumbles awhile among his parcels, and then takes out a small, oblong package.

"Here, boy, hold this a minute," he calls to Dick, handing him the package, while he extricates himself from his constrained position.

Dick takes instant opportunity to read its address:

"ANDREW WILLIAMSON,
Fourth and Walnut Sts., Philadelphia."

On the opposite side was the broad card of the Adams Express Co., dated at Chester, Pa., the previous day.

"That will do, my lad," said the expressman, cheerily, as he took the package. "Ask me for a sugar plum the next time you see me."

"If you only knowed what a sugar plum you'd giv me now!" thought Dick, as he walked easily away. "Guess I've done my day's work."

But his day's work was not yet performed. He had not gone any great distance on his homeward journey ere he formed a new resolution.

"Allers best to strike while the iron's hot," he declared. "Don't do to leave bizness like this open if you don't want it to spile. Guess I'd best go see my detectives and sort out some work for them."

Dick laughed silently as a comical thought occurred to him.

"Bet there ain't many customers in these diggin's keeps as fine a pack of private detectives as Dick Darling. And the beauty of it is, they think they're using me. That's the gayest sell out."

He continued his silent enjoyment of the thought as he made his way toward the domicile of Ned Hogan.

"I'll giv Hogan the Chester job, 's long as he's got a look-out there. The other chaps kin work the Bosting lay. Guess that's a fair divide of the 'sponsibility. Gettin' too much work on my shoulders fur one boy to put through without help."

He found Hogan at home, seated behind his everlasting meerschaum, which he was wasting his life in efforts to color. At least his persistent application seemed to indicate that as his object.

"Got five minutes fer you," announced Dick, with an air of great importance, as he deposited himself in the nearest chair. "Want you to write a letter in double quick?"

"Sartain!" assented Hogan, enjoying what seemed to strike him as a good joke. "What is it to be? Propel."

He drew pen, ink and paper from the drawer of his desk.

"Want you to write to your watch-dog, Harris, at Chester. I'll jist giv you the pints. You kin shape them. Mr. Andrew Williamson, of this big town, jist got a package from Chester by Adams Express. Must have been sent yesterday or this mornin'. Now I want Harris to find out all he kin 'bout that package; who sent it, what kind of a cove he was, where he hails from, or any particulars he kin stir up. Do you take it in?"

"Yes," averred Hogan. "Are you in earnest?"

"Solid; nothing else now."

"Here goes then."

Hogan proceeded to write as directed by Dick, folding and sealing the letter.

"And now, what the blazes is it all about?" he demanded, holding the letter in his hand. "Have you trod into any lark's nest?"

"Guv me the letter," was Dick's only reply. "I'll post it. Tain't safe to answer your question yet. Want to hear from Harris fust. Mought be barkin' up the wrong tree."

Dick took his departure, hastening to the nearest lamp-post to deposit his letter.

"So much fur my white alley," he laughed. "And if Ned Hogan thinks I'm goin' to sell out to him he dunno where I got my eddication. Ain't diggin' up purtaters for no sich chaps as him to eat. Guess I'll butter my own biscuit."

And Dick, with much self-importance, made his way toward the hotel patronized by the government detectives.

CHAPTER XIII.

DICK AND HIS DETECTIVES.

Dick had the same luck with the government officials as he had had with Ned Hogan, finding them both at home.

They were seated at their table, busily engaged in writing, when Dick swaggered into the room, dispensing with the formality of a knock.

"You see, I'm allers at home 'mong my friends," he announced. "Don't ax me to take a cheer. That mought interfere with the freedom of the citizen, you know." He helped himself to a chair with all the freedom possible as he spoke. "Go on with your dockuments. Don't mind me. My bizness kin wait."

"I swear if I think you'll ever die of modesty," cried Will Frazer. "Out with your business, for we've no time for nonsense now."

"All right!" and Dick, unabashed, drew his chair up to the table. "Put your dockuments out of sight. My eyes gits unruly sometimes, and tumble into seeing things that's none of their affairs. Want you to lay out on another letter?"

"Why, you are death on letters, Dick," declared Jack Bounce. "You do seem to keep up an extensive correspondence. What is it about now?"

"Know anybody in Bosting? Any guv'nors, perlicemen, or sich?"

"Where?" asked Jack.

"In Bosting. The place where all the smart people cum from. That little down-east villain that's like me, won't never die of modesty."

"Oh! Boston, you mean."

"And didn't I say Bosting? Don't know as I often say what I don't mean."

"I know some of the Bostonian officers," admitted Frazer, "if that will satisfy you."

"That's clever," and Dick spread himself for a serious job of dictation. "Write to the smartest Yankee you know as follows:—I want him or her, whichever it is, to hunt up a fam'ly in Bosting, that calls itself Milton."

"Very well. What is the first name?"

"Jist say Milton, and you'll say all I know. Twenty years ago, or thereaway, this fam'ly dwelt somewhere in the outskirts of Bosting, in an old-fashioned stone house. It had grounds around it, and all the houses in sight had grounds. They seemed somehow to run to grounds."

"All right. Go on."

"This fam'ly consisted of a handsome daddy and a beautiful mammy, and a neat little toad of a boy, jist turned of bein' a baby. Well, the boy was stole, and has never been heard tell of since, though they've wasted enough cash in advertisements to keep up a first-class dry-goods store, and offered mints of money in rewards, and the daddy's grown old and pegged out, and the mammy's growin' old and peggin' out. Got the ideal of all that?"

"Is it a five-cent novel you are composing now?" asked Jack Bounce, laughing at Dick's grandiloquent manner.

"True as gospel, every word I've spoke. There's money in it, and I know where to lay my finger on the boy, that's growed up to be a handsome young man, the picture of his daddy. And there's chaps tryin' to work a traverse, and play the lost son found, and throw him out in the cold. You see I'm posted."

"Your novel is making good headway, anyhow," was Jack's laughing comment.

"Never your mind. Put it all down, and giv me the letter to post. If your Yankee comes up to the scratch like a man, you kin bet there'll be fun."

Jack wrote the letter to Dick's satisfaction, addressed it as directed by Frazer, and gave it to the boy to post.

"Is that correct?" he asked of the boy.

"Right to the bull's-eye. Must be goin'. Any news since I see'd you last?"

"Only the arrest of Spencer, with a batch of a new issue of counterfeiters in his house."

"Yes. That's the out-and-outerest sell. Know Harry Spencer a bit too well to swaller that. What's more, I've got a notion of the cove as put up the job on him. Where is he? In Moya?"

"No. He is out on bail."

"Clever!" exclaimed Dick. "These chaps best be keeful they don't wake up Dick Darling. If they do, ther'll be 'tarnal ructions. Anything from Sol Sly?"

"We have a deep shadow on him," answered Jack. "I am of the notion that that long nose of yours has smelt out something there. He has more customers than come to buy clothes."

"I knowed it!" declared Dick, triumphantly. "Watch them. Watch them all. It's a big ring we've got to sarcomvent. Catch him shovin' any of the queer?"

"Yes. He tried to pass one of the new counterfeit-felts. It came back to him, and he overflowed with apologies and explanations."

"He should have been arrested," averred Will.

"Not yet," said Dick, positively. "I don't b'lieve in pullin' up my fish with a hook and line, when there's a chance to sweep them all in, at one haul, in a drag-net. Keep shady till all the fish git in our pond. Then pull in your net."

"Good advice, Dick," and Jack slapped him heartily on the shoulder. "You are a born detective, and shrewder than half the force. You say you know that a job was put up on Spencer, and who did it?"

"That's what I think. Tain't what I know," was Dick's cautious reply.

"Who is your man?"

"The chap you're watchin' on South street; Mr. Solomon Sly. Mind, I don't know this. And I'd give a cold b'iled mack'el to have it proved. But a fox that's onc't learnt the way to a chicken-coop is apt to sneak back ag'in."

"And what follows?"

"That Sol will have more bizness in Harry Spencer's house. And soon, too, if I ain't off my eggs. Watch him like a hawk, for sure as you live, there's folks putting up another job on Spencer."

"And if he should try it?"

"Snatch him, jist as you'd snatch the last cold

'tater on the plate. S'arch him, and salt down his valuables. Don't leave nothing cur'us 'bout him."

"And if he should have nothing?"

"Beg his pardon, and let him slide. He'll only be like a pigeon, with a string to his leg. He won't fly out of sight. I must be gettin' now, gents. Fear my supper'll git cold waitin', and never could digest cold vittels."

And Dick walked out of the room with an air as if he carried a separate world on each shoulder.

CHAPTER XIV.

RECOLLECTIONS OF CHILDHOOD.

HARRY SPENCER walked along with his head down and a deeply troubled look upon his face.

"It seems as if the sky had suddenly fallen out of my world. Everything was so bright and promising, and now misfortunes seem treading in each other's footsteps. If I could but lay my hand on this hidden and silent enemy who is working in the dark against me."

He walked on reflectively. The street was little frequented. Evening was coming on with a damp, chill feel in the air. He drew his coat closer round him, with a slight shudder.

"I am free, but how shall I ever escape the consequences of the coming trial? Those counterfeit notes—it was shrewd work of my enemy. I can see but one way clear. If I can but discover who has an object in injuring me, I may put the officers on the track of the true counterfeiters."

The thought seemed to strike him as a good one. He considered it in all its bearings.

"Was there any purpose in that strange note from Chester to get me out of the way? How did that man learn what he professes to know of my early life? If this be the act of my enemy, he must have known me since childhood. But no. There is more in it than I suppose. I have hopes that the mystery of my life may be soon unfolded, and I gain once more the blessing of my parents' love, which has been stolen from me since childhood."

He paused for a moment, looking vacantly along the street.

"My enemy has worked in another direction," he next mused. "Something has come between me and Helen. Nothing of her own will, I know, for her action on my arrest was a sweet assurance that I had indeed won her love. It may have been some influence brought to bear upon her proud mother. If I could but meet Helen—if I could but learn—"

He paused, for a figure which he had been noting for some time in the distance, now declared itself to his recollection.

"It is he!" he said. "The Chester man. This is an opportune meeting."

Joe Turner, for it was our red-haired acquaintance, seemed to recognize Harry as quickly.

"I was wishing to see you again," the fellow declared; "but have not had time to call at your house."

"You brought me very interesting information, sir," answered Harry, "though rather vague and shadowy. I am anxious to learn more from you in relation to this matter."

"There are reasons why I should not tell you any more at present," replied Turner. "I may be raising false hopes in your mind. I must first learn if the recollections you have given me agree with the facts; I have written to a legal friend in New Orleans to inquire, and if you can recall any other remembrances of your infancy, no matter how slight, they may be very important. What you have given me, so far, is too general."

"I have been trying to recollect," responded Harry. "I can only recall one or two slight points. I remember a fall I had in childhood from the arms of the lady I mentioned, and her great trouble in consequence; I also recollect a toy of which I was very fond. It was a little box, with a black figure in it, which sprung up on touching a spring; I remember that the figure had lost its nose."

"These are important particulars," averred Turner. "Any one might describe the house; but special incidents are not so easily arrived at. You have no other relic than the one mentioned?"

"That is all."

"I should like to see it."

"I have it in my private desk at home. If you should call, I will show it to you."

"Thank you; I shall do so very soon. I must be going now. Good-day," and Turner walked on.

Harry proceeded slowly in the opposite direction.

"I am too easy with him," he mused. "I should make him tell what he knows. The world is so full of rogues that how do I know but that this is a scheme to get facts from me which he may use to his own ends?" He paused irresolutely, half inclined to return after the man. "But he knows all, and I know nothing. He has the advantage of me in that; and it is not so easy to force people, except it be to force them into being your foes. I shall have to wait and trust to his good intentions. And, oh! how my soul longs to know if he has indeed found my parents, if this dark blot upon my life may indeed be swept away."

Harry now turned upon the busy pavement of Eighth street, yet thronged with people, late as it was in the day.

These, however, were mostly people on their daily way home from employment, the army of shoppers having long since marched off with its spoils.

Yet some few stragglers remained. A handsome carriage was drawn up before the door of a large dry-goods establishment, its ebony-skinned coachman evidently impatient of the long delay. He did not seem to approve of late shopping.

Just as Harry reached this point, two ladies stepped from the store door. They were about entering the carriage when the elder paused, and said:

"I think, after all, Helen, I had better have that lace. It will only take a minute or two. You need not come back; wait for me in the carriage."

Gathering up her long train, the richly-attired lady swept back into the store, with all the grand manner of a queen of society.

The younger lady was about stepping into the carriage, when her purpose was arrested by a light touch upon her arm, and the tones of a well-known voice.

"One moment, Helen—Miss Andrews."

She turned, with a slight start on seeing that it was indeed Harry Spencer, he who had been somehow that moment in her thoughts.

"My mother will be back immediately, Mr. Spencer," she said, in a warning voice.

"Yes, yes, I know; I have but a word. There has something come between us—the work of an enemy, I fear."

"The work of an enemy," she faintly replied.

"Can you tell me his name—and his object?" was his quick rejoinder.

"Not now—not now!" she answered. "I may—at some future time—when I am assured—when I feel at liberty to speak."

"It is very important that I should know now," he replied. "My arrest may have been the work of the same enemy."

"I will write—when I learn anything," she responded, in the same hurried, broken tone. "Stay no longer, sir. My mother will be here."

"One word more," he persisted, arresting her movement toward the carriage. "Some unknown friend saved me from the horrors of a prison. Do you know whom?"

He looked eagerly into her eyes.

She turned her head away, answering in constrained accents:

"How should I know? It matters not. There is no virtue in assisting people where one risks nothing. Good-by, Mr. Spencer."

She gave him her hand, and one long look from her soft eyes. A liquid luster swam in those deep orbs. She seemed loth to turn them away.

"Good-by, Helen," he said, with more tenderness in his lingering intonation than he dreamed of.

He assisted her into the carriage and walked on, just an instant before her mother stepped, in all her stateliness, from the store.

Mrs. Andrews leaned indolently back upon the richly-upholstered cushions, as the carriage rolled away.

"I did not take the lace, after all," she remarked; "it was not as fine as I thought. By the way, did I not see a young gentleman assisting you into the carriage?"

"Yes," slightly changing color.

"Who was it?"

"Mr. Spencer," was the quiet reply.

A look of dismay came upon the mother's face; she used her fan rapidly, but said nothing, and did not again speak during the ride home.

"There is a gentleman in the parlor," announced the girl, on their entering the house.

"Ah, who is it?" asked Mrs. Andrews.

"It is only I," spoke a voice from the open parlor door, and Mr. Williamson stepped out into the hall.

"Very happy to see you," declared the lady. "We have just returned from a shopping expedition. Helen, entertain Mr. Williamson for a few minutes, until I remove my wraps."

Helen entered the parlor with a very unpromising look upon her face. She knew well what her mother meant by the few minutes, and dreaded an interview with this man. She seated herself without removing her shawl and hat.

"I have not seen you, Helen," he said, taking a chair near her, "since your abrupt dismissal of me a week or so ago. I do not know yet what I did on that occasion to offend you."

"I did not give you to understand that I was offended."

"Yes; I took your action to mean that."

"I was offended," she coldly replied.

"And why? What had I done?—what had I said?"

"I do not see that any explanations are necessary. I am very weary, Mr. Williamson; I hope you will not dwell on this undesirable subject."

"You grow weary very easily lately—of my society," he replied, with a sudden burst of anger. "Once you were more complaisant. I have a right to demand the reason of this change."

"When a professed gentleman descends to the envious detraction of another, he has no reason to ask so pointedly why he has made his motives and himself despised." Her tone was hot as his. "You volunteered uncalled-for gossip about Mr. Spencer, with the object of injuring him in my estimation. You have but injured yourself."

"I said only the truth. He is a—"

"It matters not what he is," she coldly interrupted. "I do not think the tone of this interview is sufficiently pleasant for either of us to wish to continue it. I shall send my mother down to you, Mr. Williamson."

She left the room with a deeply-offended air, leaving him gnawing his lip in anger. He sat a moment irresolutely; then suddenly started up, seized his hat, and left the house.

"I shall be even with you yet, my lady!" he muttered, bitterly, as he descended the steps with a fierce tread.

CHAPTER XV.

DICK FEELING HIS LINES.

DICK'S watchfulness had redoubled after the reception by Mr. Williamson of the express-package. There was not a person who entered or left the

building containing his office but passed under the surveillance of the boy's keen eyes. There was not a parcel of any uncertain character taken from the building but what he traced it to its destination. There was not a step taken by Mr. Williamson but it was closely followed by our young sleuth-bound.

The lawyer's keenness on a former occasion had taught Dick a useful lesson. He was not the rat to be caught twice in the same trap. Williamson little dreamed under what a close scrutiny his every movement was placed.

This incessant vigilance of Dick was not without its reward. He succeeded in adding another valuable mesh to the net which he was slowly drawing around certain unsuspecting individuals.

"I tell you," he declared to Jack Bounce, dropping in unceremoniously on that easy-going personage, "I tell you there's fun afloat. More work cut out for you detectives."

"How is that?" asked Jack, taking his feet down from the window and looking round at Dick.

"What's broke loose now, my lad?"

"Fun!" announced Dick, seating himself astride a chair. "I'm working up a little traverse, Mr. Bounce, looking the embodiment of boyish shrewdness, and if I ain't left out some of the figgers, or got in a loose screw somewhere, then there'll be ructions. That's all."

"Suppose you get a little nearer the point, my youthful friend. Then it might be remotely possible to get an inkling of what you are diving at—which it would puzzle the devil to tell now."

"I thought it was the business of you detectives to see clear in shady places," retorted Dick, with a laugh. "Well, this is the solid English of it. If I ain't sold out by circumstances, there'll be new counterfeits on the market afore the next sun gits his head above water."

"How do you know this, boy?" demanded Jack, speaking quickly and sharply.

"It's a way I have of smel'ing out things."

"That's not much of an answer."

"Bless you," said Dick, laughing, "I didn't intend to give you much of an answer. I allers want my figgers to prove themselves afore I add them up. It's jist this. I've follered what I think are counterfeits into certain shady places. I don't know, mind you; and maybe won't jist yit. So I'll hold my tongue. But if you hear soon of anybody shovin' the queer, jist recollect that Dick Darling told you so."

Jack looked at the boy with an odd expression. He seemed puzzling himself to take Dick's measure.

"All right," he exclaimed. "I don't forget easily."

"Any news from Bosting yit?"

"Nothing. It is too soon."

"It'll come. There's a bit more of fun in that quarter."

"That is another of your deep secrets, Dick," the detective remarked, indifferently.

"Yes. I'm great guns on a secret. Like them too well to sell them out cheap. The beer's a-brewin', my friend. You shall have your cup full when it's time."

Dick had his elbows on the back of the chair, and his face compressed between his two hands, looking a very owl of wisdom as he spoke.

Jack Bounce laughed as he caught the comical expression of the boy.

"I should like to know in what blind alley you were brought up. You are the queerest specimen I have seen for an age."

"Cute, ain't it?"

"Cute is no word for it."

"That's what I'm a-diggin' for. It's jist my idear of glory."

They were interrupted at this point by the entrance of Jack's associate, Mr. Will Frazer.

The spare face of this gentleman was somewhat flushed, as if he had been imbibing good liquor, or bad news.

He flung himself recklessly into a chair, looking up with a woebegone expression that set Jack laughing.

"It beats thunder!"

"And thunder ain't easy beat," was Jack's response.

"I'm jist ready to give up."

"Don't give up the ship," quoted Jack, with a comical grimace.

"Oh! you'd be fiddling if the world was on fire," growled Will, impatiently. "You are the most aggravating—"

"But I don't see that even a corner of the world is on fire. There is not a straw burning, so far as my eyesight goes!"

Dick, who had a high admiration of Jack Bounce's wit, sat listening, with his whole face full of silent enjoyment.

"I'll show you where the fire is," exclaimed Will. "What do you think of a new note afloat? A brand-new twenty on the Arlington First National. And hardly a false line in it. It took one of our cutest brokers to make it out. I tell you this is enough to make a man forswear his grandfather."

Jack had started hastily from his lounging position on hearing these words. His eyes were fixed on Dick as if he was looking at a wizard.

"Well, I'll be shot if it ain't jist come out as he said," cried the officer. "You're on a hot trail, Dick, sure as shooting! What is it, boy? And who are the parties in it?"

"Don't know," Dick drawled out, with an aggravating utterance. "I see'd somethin', that I suspected was queer money, takin' wing. Couldn't swear, though, that this is the same stuff, and wouldn't like to risk troublin' innocent folks."

"Leave that to us. We are older hands than you. Put us on the track and leave us to follow it up."

"Did put you on Sol Sly's track, returned Dick. "How's that lay progressing?"

"He is a doubtful character. But we haven't caught him napping yet."

"And won't very soon," added Will, with a touch of scorn. "The boy was right in one thing, though. The Jew has been in 1,085 North Eleventh street."

"When? To-day?" asked Dick, quickly.

"Yes."

"To see the folks?"

"To see Mr. Spencer, who was absent. Mr. Sly waited a half-hour for his return, and then left, saying he would call again."

"That's growin' nobby and interestin'" and Dick was somewhat excited. "What follered? Did you 'bey orders? Did you snatch him and go through him?"

"Yes. He was arrested and searched. And pretty fools we made of ourselves to pay any attention to your vagabondish fancies."

"Didn't find nothin', then?" asked Dick, excitedly.

"Hain't stole nothin'."

"Nothing lighter than a grindstone, nor heavier than a feather," said Will, sarcastically. "We found not a penny's worth about him that didn't belong to him. Nothing more than a few nickels and a trinket or two. His whole outfit wasn't worth the beating and threatening we got."

"A few trinkets, eh?" mused Dick, paying no attention to his other words. "What kind of trinkets?"

"I hardly know, as I took little notice of them. A cameo pin, a bronze medal, with an odd sort of chain, a—"

"There! that'll do. That's a-plenty!" said Dick, with intense sarcasm. "And you let him slide, with all that on him?"

"Yes."

"Well, you *did* make purty fools of yourselves, and you kin say so ag'in and tell no lie. Why, Jack Bounce, that medal was the very thing he went through Harry Spencer's house for! And you're goin' to make a mint of trouble by lettin' it slip through your fingers."

"May be we had better search him again and relieve him of it," suggested Jack.

"Search a hen's roost for eggs arter a weasel's been there!" said Dick, contemptuously. "That jig's danced. Can't git it up ag'in. Bet high that Sol hain't that medal ten minits arter the perlice opened their claws and let him slide. I know where it is, though, and I'm goin' for it, quicker'n greased lightnin' ever went for a scorched pig!"

And Dick left the room in high disgust with the police.

He had another important interview that same day with Ned Hogan.

The latter had just heard from Mr. Harris, at Chester, and had some information which Dick deemed of interest.

"He easily traced the man who left the package," confessed the detective.

"That's my mutton," cried Dick. "Who and what was the chap?"

"Harris represents him as a gentlemanly young fellow, who has been boarding for the last six months at the Steamboat Hotel in Chester. A well-dressed, sociable chap, who seems to have nothing to do but to enjoy himself, and plenty of money to help him do it. Nothing odd or suspicious about him."

"Mebbe not. What's his name?"

"William Hendricks."

"All right! Wears store-clothes, and cuts a figure, eh? O. K.! Bet he's my meat. Been investigatin' the Molly lately?"

"Yes. But Turner is pumped dry, I fancy; for nothing comes up now, pump as hard as I will."

"He's cute!" said Dick, admiringly.

"I only learned one piece of information."

"Let's hear it."

"The Molly is going to change her quarters. She sails from this port at ten to-morrow mornin'."

"That's news. There's more fun afloat. Shouldn't wonder if I sailed with her. Look out for news soon, Mr. Hogan. Things is comin' to a focus. And now, if you ain't got no objection, I'll go hunt my supper."

And, without waiting for an objection, Dick took his departure.

CHAPTER XVI.

DICK'S THIRD BATH.

NED HOGAN was right in one piece of information he had gained. There were busy notes of preparation on board the yacht Molly, the next morning. It was a bright, balmy day in the latter part of April, the sun shining with a warmth and splendor that presaged August weather.

Just at ten Mr. Williamson, who had been for some time closeted in the cabin, left the yacht, crying cheerily to the captain, who had followed him on deck:

"A prosperous voyage! Be sure you hit the mark. Keep me posted in all your movements."

"Ay! ay!" sung back Cap. Parker, waving his hands in adieu.

He was a handsome fellow, with long black mustache and dark curly hair. There was something in his face not unlike that of Harry Spencer.

Yet his expression was very different, his eyes having an unsteady, sinister look, while his weak mouth and chin seemed to indicate a lack of energy.

"If it is necessary tel graph, and I will come on at once," said Williamson.

"I don't think it will be necessary," the captain answered; "I have the facts here, and here," tap-

ping his forehead and his vest-pocket. "It will go hard if I don't manage them. Cast off that line!" he cried to one of the two sailors of the yacht.

In a minute more the Molly began to slowly glide out of her dock. Her sail was partly raised, and caught a breath of the fitful wind.

Now all her sails rose to the mast-head and were spread to their fullest extent. There was something bird-like in the graceful movement with which she bent to the breeze, and glided with increasing speed out into the broad bosom of the river.

Mr. Williamson stood gazing admiringly after her, as did also a knot of loungers on the next wharf.

Yet there was nowhere a sign of Dick Darling, who had, the night before, expressed his intention of taking a trip on the Molly. Had he changed his mind? Or had he been frightened off by the presence of Williamson? It was certain that he was not on board.

The yacht stood across till near the bar, then veered and stood down the open channel of the river.

The lawyer now turned and walked away, just one minute too soon to witness an incident which was curiously noted by the group of loungers.

"Look at the boy! He don't know how to use an oar I guess," said one. "What boat is that he's got?"

"Oh! Joe Carson's leaky old tub, that isn't worth the oakum to stop the leaks. The boy borrowed it to go a-fishing. By thunder, he'll be struck!"

"The yacht is trying to get out of his way."

"But did you ever see oars handled so awkwardly? He is right across her fore-foot again."

"Down goes his house!" shouted the other speaker. "I hope the venturesome young vagabond won't be drowned."

At that instant a slight, crashing sound was heard, reaching faintly to their ears. The boat they had been watching passed under the swiftly-gliding yacht.

"Where is the boy? Is he gone?" cried the first speaker, in alarm. "I'll swear the yachtmen didn't half try to get out of running him down."

"Drown him," rejoined the other. "You could as well drown a fish. There he goes!"

They could see a slight, boyish form, clambering, hand over hand, up the side of the vessel, by a rope he had grasped. In a moment more he sprang lightly in on the Molly's deck.

We will accompany him on board. He stood erect and defiant on the deck, the water running in streams from his drenched clothes.

"Well, if you ain't a purty set of one-hoss sailors, I'll sell out!" he exclaimed, contemptuously.

"There's a new boat smashed inter kindlin' wood 'cause there ain't a man on board knows how to shift a rudder. You'd best go ashore and hire in a menagerie."

"It's your own stupidity, boy," growled Cap. Parker, advancing. "What business have you in the channel, when you know no more than a cow about handling an oar?"

"That's right; blow me up, arter you've run me down and half-drowned me," retorted Dick, for it was that precious individual. "Ain't you got a cook-stove somewhere handy, where I can git my French broadcloth dried?"

"We had best stand in and put him ashore," suggested Joe Turner to the captain.

"No hurry 'bout that," said Dick. "I want to git dried fust. You kin drop me out somewhere down the river. Don't be feared but I'll drop on my legs no matter where you fling me. I'm at home anywhere."

And the independent young rogue went below in search of a fire where he might dry his dripping clothes.

"Well, he's a queer customer," declared Cap. Parker. "Where is the boat?"

"Oh! it was a rotten old shell," replied Turner.

"It ain't worth pickin' up. And as long as the little villain is in no hurry about gettin' ashore—we can take him at his word. It is bad luck to turn back after making a good start. We can land him at Chester."

"That will do, Joe, as long as he is so easily satisfied. He is a saucy-looking young villain."

Swiftly down the river sped the yacht, in front of the long, red lines of the city. She was an excellent sailer, and light as the wind was, her great spread of sail caught up every wandering puff, and turned it into rapid motion through the sunlit waters.

It was high noon before Dick again appeared on deck, thoroughly dried and renovated, for one of the men, with a soft spot in his soul, had taken the boy in hand, giving him a thorough rubbing from head to foot, and ironing out his wet clothes.

"There, I feel jist as neat as a new clothes-pin," announced Dick, cheerily, as he stepped into the open sun. "I'm in for a new bath though. This is my second trip overboard inside a week. 'Spose I'll have another trip. Things allers goes by threes, you know."

It was not twenty minutes before he was hail-fellow with all the crew, from the captain down, his cheery independence of manner seeming to just hit their fancies.

"Dunno but I'd jist as lieve go round the world in a craft like this," he declared, as he took in the delight of their swift, smooth motion. "She's jist like a bird on the wing. Couldn't carry them sails, though, in a wind."

"It would take a strong gale to make the Molly haul in her wings," averred Cap. Parker. "And as for your going around the world, it is only sailors, not land-rats, that make that trip."

"And what makes a sailor?" asked Dick.

"He's got to be as much at home on deck or aloft as a tailor on his board, or a farmer with his plow. I don't think you'd make much headway in shinning

up the shrouds, or sand-papering the mast-head in a gale."

"Sand paper be blowed!" said Dick, contemptuously. "You can't put that down my throat. And as for them rope-ladders, if them's what you call shrouds, bet I can run up them faster than a squirrel can run up a gum-tree."

With a quick spring from the deck Dick caught the shrouds, and twisting himself around to their outer side he ran up as nimbly as if he had spent his life at the mast-head of a vessel.

"Aho! there, you lubbers!" he cried, from aloft. "How's that for a greenhorn's fingers and toes? What, next? Want me to stand on my head on top of the mast?"

"I want you to come down from there!" shouted Cap. Parker. "The venturesome young villain would do it," he said to Turner.

"I shouldn't like to dare him too far," replied the latter.

Dick caught a rope and slid rapidly down, disdaining the slower passage by the shrouds.

"Guess I could learn, Cap. Whereaway are you bound?"

"To Boston."

"Bosting, hey! Where's Bosting?"

"Oh! miles and miles away, over theseas. Further, I fancy, than you will sail this trip."

"Guess so. If I know myself, Philadelphia's my head center. Don't want to git too far away."

For the next hour or two Dick continued to make himself at home on the Molly, investigating every part of the vessel, making friends with everybody, and keeping a keen eye open for any indication of a contraband cargo.

And down the broad Delaware the yacht glided, past green shores, and the white lines of a low fort, past the flat, long island of Tinicum, till in the distance rose the roofs and spires of a small town along the river flats, and topping the low hills in the background.

"What do you call that place, Cap?" asked Dick, with innocent curiosity.

"That is Chester."

"Chester? Yes, I've heard tell of it. Tain't much. Goin' to stop there, Cap?"

"Guess so. It will be a good place to get rid of you."

"How folks do think alike," said Dick. "I was jist thinkin' it would be a good place to get rid of you."

"Anxious to get ashore, Dick?"

"Kinder. Don't want to git too fur from headquarters."

"How would you like to stay with us and learn to be a sailor?"

"Ain't I stinguished myself enough in that line a'ready? Thought I'd done enough to 'arn a medal or sich. Or a pretty chain like that stickin' outer your vest pocket."

There was hardly the eighth of an inch of the chain in question visible, and Dick's notion of its beauty seemed to be largely guess-work.

"If you got that you would have medal and chain both," said Cap, laughing, as he drew the chain from his pocket.

It was a small, neatly-stamped bronze medal, the chain attached to it being twisted in a peculiarly odd fashion.

Dick's eyes danced as he saw it.

"That's jist the leather medal I've 'arn'd. Let me try it on."

And without waiting for an answer he took it from Cap. Parker's careless grasp and flung the chain round his neck.

"How's that for a set-off?" proudly. "Guess it becomes my style of beauty."

He turned his eyes carelessly toward the shore. The channel here closely approached the land, and the boat was not two hundred yards from shore. The breeze had freshened somewhat, and she was running rapidly down the channel. Several stone farm-houses rose some distance back from the shore. Chester had now loomed up into its full proportions, about half a mile distant. Just below them the tortuous channel of Ridley creek emptied into the river.

"You have impudence enough to hang you, boy!" growled Cap. Parker, half-angrily. "Give me back the medal!"

"Not if I know myself," sturdily. "You said, out-and-out, that I'd 'arn'd a medal, and giv me this. I think too much of my presents to giv them away ag'in."

"You rascally young villain, what do you mean?" cried Parker, attempting to seize him. "Hand it here immediately, or I'll swear if I don't cowhide you."

"Got to ketch your rabbit afore you kin cook him," eluding his grasp. "Tell me of it when you git it back."

"Blast your eyes!" cried Parker, in a rage, rushing after him. "Stop, or I won't leave an ounce of skin on your body!"

But Dick did not see the utility of stopping, and a rapid chase began around the deck, the captain swearing with every step. He called on the others to aid him, and a general hunt after Dick commenced. He eluded them for awhile, but it was evident that the unequal chase could not long continue.

Dick was quick to perceive this, and now made a sudden diversion in the pursuit by changing the field of operations. Grasping one of the shrouds, he ran up, hand-over-hand, on its under side, as readily as he had before done on its upper.

"Catch me who can!" he sung out, in a minute, from near the mast-head.

But he was not to be left long in this fancied security. One of the sailors ascended the opposite

shrouds, and Joe Turner commenced to climb those on which he stood, two-thirds way up.

"Mind your eye, red-head!" cried Dick. "Don't come too near or my foot might git lively."

"Bring him down here!" roared the captain. "I'll be shot if I don't make him a lesson for all young thieves!"

Dick looked keenly around. His position was getting too warm for comfort. The two pursuers were approaching dangerously near him. The light of a quick resolution broke across his face.

"Catch your rabbit first, Cap. Parker!" he shouted; "and when you git him you'd best bile him. Basting ain't good for a tender skin."

There was a quick spring that half-shook Joe Turner from the shrouds; a small, dark body descended like lightning through the air, a loud splash in the water followed, and Dick disappeared from view.

A loud curse broke from the captain's lips.

"Quick! To the sheels! Down with your helm! Bring her round lively! I'll be hanged if I don't run the young hound down!"

But it took some time to get all hands at their posts to wear ship, and by the time the Molly came round, she was five hundred yards away from Dick, who had appeared on the surface and was swimming lustily for shore.

For several minutes it was doubtful if he would succeed. The Molly took the wind on her own quarter and came on at a rapid pace.

But the bottom shoaled her rapidly, and they were obliged to suddenly haul off when they saw Dick with his foot on the bottom, less than fifty yards distant.

With a cry of uncontrollable rage Cap. Parker seized a musket and aimed at the boy.

Ere he could pull the trigger, however, the weapon was thrown up by the hand of Joe Turner.

"That won't do, Cap," he said, sternly. "Murder is a dangerous plaything."

Dick had now gained sure footing, and was wading rapidly ashore.

"Get out the boat!" cried one of the men; "we can catch him yet."

"You can catch a swallow on the wing!" was Turner's observation, as he saw Dick climbing the river bank. "But we must have that medal back, by hook or crook. Strike quick for Chester, and we will see what can be done."

The last they saw of Dick he was standing upright on the bank, his finger to his nose indulging in some odd gyrations.

He plunged out of sight behind the bank as the Molly wore gracefully round upon her heel, and resumed her rapid flight down-stream.

CHAPTER XVII.

DICK AMONG THE GHOSTS.

Dick's first impulse was to put some desirable distance between himself and his late friends on the Molly.

But a preliminary look over the bank satisfied him that there was no haste needed, as the yacht had resumed her down-river course, and there were no fears of immediate pursuit. He took out the medal and gazed at it with curious eyes.

"Worked a sharp traverse on Cap. Parker, I calculate," he thought, as he put his prize carefully away. "I'm feared he won't find it quite so easy to play his little game. But, this kind of thing is gettin' a leetle monotonous. Here I am as wet as a new herring ag'in, and these darned new clothes are hangin' as light on me as a stepmother's blessing. What's the lay of the land heresaway?"

Dick stood in a clump of willows near the mouth of Ridley creek, that here made a sharp bend and ran at an angle into the river.

Only a short distance to the north stood the low frame buildings of the fishery. Their hauls had been made for the day, and the immense seine net was hung up on its framework to dry, while the fishermen were busy in preparing a great catch of shad for market.

"Guess there's a cook-stove 'bout them shanties. I'm gittin' kinder hungry for a dry skin, and maybe they'll give me the tail end of a briled shad to wash it down."

Dick found no difficulty in getting both his requirements. His escape from the yacht had been seen by some of the men, and many were the curious questions asked him as he sat steaming before a hot fire.

"It weren't nothin'," protested Dick. "Had a few words with a chap there that thinks he owns the sun and moon, and would like to claim a considerable sprinklin' of the stars. We got kinder hot over it, and he brung out a cowhide for his end of the argument. Now, that's a kind of argyfin' that ain't got no good logic in it. Struck me it were a good time to come ashore—so I come."

Dick closed his lips as if he thought he had been unusually profuse in explanation, and that further words were quite unnecessary.

The grateful warmth of the stove drew clouds of steam from his drenched clothes, and he sat toasting himself with deep enjoyment of life, while a kind-faced old fisherman put the half of a shad on to fry for him.

"I judge you're hungry," remarked the old fellow, as he sprinkled the fish liberally with salt. "We've got our in-ides to look after as well as our outsides. You're mighty young fry to be knocking around this way."

"Oh, I'm seasoned," protested Dick, laughing, as he turned another side to the fire. "Had pepper and salt rubbed inter me 'fore I war old enough to know beans from pumpkins. Guess I can hoe my own row."

"You're a cute one," acknowledged the old man, "and a well-built chap, too. Wouldn't you like to

take a turn at the net? It's good pay, and plenty to eat."

"Feared I mightn't like fish for a steady diet," demurred Dick, as he cut into the well-cooked shad, which the old man had just placed before him. "It's good though, when a feller's been brung up on thin livin'. Whereabouts are we here? What's that place down the river?"

"That's Chester."

"Chester, hey? It's a sizable village. Fine country 'bout here, I reckon?"

"Yes, very good. The Efinger farm, across the railroad there, is a first-rate one."

Dick looked out the open door at the men who were busily engaged with their scaly and shining harvest. Some distance away, though not far back from the river, stood a white stone house, that had about it an unmistakable air of desertion.

"That a farm-house?" asked Dick, as he turned to dry the few remaining wet spots. "Looks as if the family weren't to home."

"The family there don't need shut windows or hot fires," answered the old man, mysteriously. "Hot nor cold don't hurt them."

"What do you mean?" asked Dick.

"Nobody ever saw them, but many has heard them," was the reply. "Ghosts keep that house."

"Ghosts!" echoed Dick, hands and eyes uplifted in wonder. "What, real hobbegoblins? Fellers that kick around the world with nothin' on them, not even flesh or bones?"

"Just that kind."

"Well!" cried Dick, with a long breath. "Tell me all about them. If there's anything I like it's ghosts. Sooner have a ghost any day than catfish for supper."

"Think I'd sooner have catfish."

"But what kind of ghosts? White fellers, or them you can see through, or them that takes it out in kicking up tantrums, and never shows themselves? I'm an epicure in ghosts. Don't like all sorts."

"There hasn't nobody never seen them," declared the old man, solemnly. "All there is is footsteps, and slamming of doors, and such like. And when you follow them up-stairs they're kicking up the same row down-stairs before you could say Jack Robinson. Parties have gone there to stay all night, and find out all about it; but I notice they've all got business home before morning."

"Nobody live there?"

"Live there? I bet not! The ghosts has got hold, and nobody cares to dispute their title."

"You ever been there?"

"I ain't taking none of that provender, boy. The world's big enough to hold me and the spirits too; but there ain't no house big enough to hold us both at once. I've seen lights and heard voices about the old house. That's enough for me."

"When? Late at night?"

"Yes, always after midnight."

"I dunno," observed Dick, rising. "I dunno, but as long as ghosts kin crowd inter keyholes and such, and don't take up no room, I don't see why me and a houseful of spirits can't crowd in together. Guess I'll go over and see if any of the folks is to home now."

"What? over there?" exclaimed the old man, in alarm.

"What's to hinder?" demanded Dick, coolly. "S'pose they're all in their coffins this time of day, anyhow. And if they weren't, what's the odds? Of en heered of ghosts skeering folks. Never heered of them hurting folks."

"But you ain't dry," insisted the old man, nervously.

"Dry as pine wood that's been a month bakin'," returned Dick. "Now don't you be a-worritin'. I've eat your shad, and stewed 'longside your fire, and I ain't going back on you by lettin' no critter without bones and muscles git the better of Dick Darling. I'll put myself ag'in the biggest shadder as ever kicked up a botheration, and you kin bet odds on me. Good-day, and much obleeged."

"Oh! you're highly welcome. You're a sharp little fellow, and I'd like you to keep out of harm."

"Why, bless your eyes!" averred Dick, "I've been stewed, fried, roasted, and fricaseed, been blowed up with gunpowder, and tumbled off a shot-tower, been through fire and water more than you've got fingers and toes, and I'm not the chap to be skeered outer my seventeen senses by none of your country-bred ghosts. Not me, Dick Darling."

And Dick walked off with a swinging independence that caused him to be followed with admiration by the eyes of the fishermen.

Straight to the old house he went and disappeared within its portals. A dozen eyes followed him there, and several dozens of comments upon his youthful bravado succeeded.

But with the most sublime indifference to their opinions, Dick commenced his investigation of the haunted house.

It had been originally a stone farm-house, the walls substantially built, and the woodwork yet resisting the action of time, though the rains through the open windows had ridged and mildewed the floors, and frescoed the walls with countless stains.

The boy picked his way gingerly over the wet and slippery floors, passing through empty room after room, with nothing out of the ordinary anywhere visible.

"A high old shanty this to get up a ghost story on!" decided Dick, uplifting his nose in contempt. "The ideal of a spirit comin' all the way from t'other world to take boardin' in a rotten old crib like this! Don't stuff none of that down my throat. Cap. Parker didn't come here for no sich ridic'ulous stuff."

Dick continued his exploration, noticing traces of recent footsteps in the rooms, but deciding that they were those of some ghost-seeking visitors.

He descended to the cellars, down stairs that were damp and slimy, and yielded like an elastic carpet to the foot.

There were two cellars. One extended under the front portion of the house, an oblong, rather narrow room, with thick stone walls. Back from this, on the north side of the house, extended a small square room. It was dark and musty, and seemed to have been formerly used for the storage of vegetables. These cellars passed under about half of the house, the remaining portion apparently being built on the bare ground.

The outer cellar yet contained several piles of rubbish remaining from the days of its occupancy as a residence. In one corner was a moldering heap of empty boxes. In another an empty flour-barrel stood with its open end downward. A badly-wrecked table and a pair of broken-backed and loose-legged chairs completed this picture of desolation, which was a fair display of the conflict between Nature and the results of modern civilization, in which Nature begins to win as soon as man's hand is withdrawn.

"Had a kind of notion that the ghost story was an out-and-out sell," mused Dick, "got up by the counterfeiter to drive folks from these diggin's. And what ghosts would want rummagin' among rotten taters and old soap-boxes giv' me. But I guess I'm out of my reckonin' 'bout the counterfeiter. 'Twouldn't be safe for them to try it on in a place like this."

He continued his explorations, examining the walls, and even looking into the empty barrel.

"Tain't no go," he said. "Mought as well hunt for an eagle's egg in a duck's nest. Guess I'll make tracks, and—Hollo! what's that?"

Footsteps sounded on the floor above. The tones of voices came down to Dick's ears.

"Wonder if them's the ghosts?" he said grimly.

"Guess I'd best look out for squalls."

The steps continued to move about the upper portion of the house. Finally they reached the cellar stairs and commenced to descend.

It was nothing ghostly that had thus startled Dick.

After Dick's escape the Molly had proceeded direct to Onester. Without loss of time Cap. Parker, Joe Turner and a third person, a resident of Chester, had left the town and sought the spot where Dick had come ashore.

Arrived there they easily learned from the fishermen what had occurred, and that Dick was now in the deserted house.

Overjoyed at their prospect of easily recovering the lost trinket they hastened thither, and at once thoroughly explored the upper rooms. Finding nothing there they descended to the cellar.

Cap. Parker reached here first and looked anxiously around. To his intense disappointment Dick was not to be seen. The cellar looked utterly desolate and deserted. Turner proceeded to the dark wing leading from the main cellar. It was equally empty.

"Either the fishermen lied or the boy is half-witch," he muttered.

"He's all young devil!" growled Cap. Parker. "I'll be shot if he hasn't flung us again. And if I get hold of him I bet he will carry home a sore back to the bosom of his family."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE DETECTIVE'S RECEPTION.

We must leave Dick Darling awhile in his mysterious disappearance and pay a flyin' visit to Philadelphia, to the residence of our government detectives, Jack Bounce and Will Frazer.

Somewhat we always find them at home and in much the same position, Jack with his feet on the window sill, in fat and hearty enjoyment of life, and Will in a lean fret about the desperate discouragements of business.

Not that they spend all their time thus. They are expert and active in their vocation, and are shrewdly working up the minor clues which they have so far gained from Dick. As yet, however, their success has not been great. Sol Sly, in particular, has taken warning from his temporary arrest, and has fallen back into the most correct man of business.

"It is devilish slow work, Jack," protested Will, pacing the floor in his uneasy way. "I know the Jew has something to do with it; but we can't nail him."

"The whole crew of them have taken fright for the present," was Jack's rejoinder. "Since that last note was offered they have gone back into their skins. They must have smelt a rat somewhere."

"Not they. I have just heard that it has been set afloat on the New York market. A full dozen of them have turned up in the banks, and the Lord knows how many of them are adrift."

"So much the better," exclaimed Jack, rubbing his hands with satisfaction.

"How do you make that out?" Will sharply questioned.

"The more daring they are the better our chances, that is all. I don't like to see them drawing back into their holes."

"That boy is a shrewd young rogue," Will suddenly declared.

"Aha! you've come to that opinion, then?"

"Yes. He has put us on the only track yet. And he knows more than he cares to tell."

"All in good time. I have great faith in Dick. He has some big thing in his eye."

Their conversation was interrupted by a knock upon the door. Will hastened to open it. It was a chambermaid who announced:

"There's a lady in the rear parlor wishes to see you."

"Ahl a young lady?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very well. We will be there."

"That's the way, as soon as a fellow gets comfortably settled," muttered Jack, rising heavily from his chair. "If it wasn't a young lady, I would leave you to see her, but you are too soft-hearted to be trusted alone with the girls."

"I!" cried Will, laughing. "Why, my heart is a millstone compared with the soft affair you carry about in that bosom of yours."

"All right," and Jack uttered a deep sigh. "Slander won't die out while this world lives. I suppose I shall have to bear my share of it."

"Yes, poor martyr," and Will slapped him heartily on the shoulder as they descended the stairs. "Folks will never appreciate your peculiar hard-heartedness."

Jack looked with eyes of admiration on the beautiful face of the young lady who advanced a step to meet them as they entered the parlor. She was seemingly too nervous to quietly await their entrance.

"You will excuse me disturbing you," she said, in a sweet voice. "I called upon you regarding a matter about which I have been rather uneasy."

"Certainly, miss. We shall be glad to help you," spoke out Jack gallantly, helping himself to a chair, while Will, with greater gallantry, handed one to the lady.

"I am told that you are government detectives, and are concerned here in seeking out the counterfeiter, who have issued so many false notes."

"I don't know how you found that out, miss, exclaimed Jack, in surprise. "People in general look upon us as two very quiet and innocent hotel boarders."

"It seems that you have been detected," she confessed, with a faint smile. "My information came from a good source."

"So it appears," admitted Will. "What can we do for you, miss?"

"Of course you are aware of the arrest of Mr. Spencer, on the charge of being connected with these forgers?"

"Oh, certainly," and Jack drew up his chair with quick interest.

"I believe—I know he is innocent," she continued, earnestly; "but I am not conversant with the particulars of the charge against him. Will you be kind enough to tell me if it is a very serious case?"

Her voice trembled as she spoke. Jack's face was full of kindly feeling as he replied:

"I am sorry, miss, that I do not know more about it. This arrest has been made by the Pinkerton officers. I do not put much faith in it."

"I thought you would know all about it," she said, falteringly.

"No. Only the general features of the charge have been made public yet," answered Will. "We know no more than you of its hidden point, which will only come out upon the trial. Our investigations have taken a different direction."

"That was one of my objects in coming here," she now answered, with an eager light in her face. "From what you know of the real criminals, from your long and close investigation, you can point suspicion in the proper direction; you can assure me that the evidence against him is of no value."

Jack coughed in an embarrassed manner, while Will had sudden business at the window, leaving his associate to explain the valuable results of their researches.

A knock at the door was a welcome diversion. Will hastened to open it, and found the same chambermaid who had before knocked at their door.

"A letter for Mr. Frazer," she announced. "And there is a man down-stairs, sir, as wants to see you both."

"Very well. Tell him he will see him in a few minutes," answered Will, impatiently, partly shutting the door, and hastening to open the letter.

"You know the charges against Mr. Spencer?"

"About the counterfeit notes being found in his rooms? Oh, yes."

"It has a serious look."

"But I know it must have been the work of some enemy," she cried, in an excited tone.

"Excuse me," interrupted Will. "This is a letter from Boston, Mr. Bounce."

"Ahl any trace of the parties?"

"Yes; the whole story is true. Mrs. Milton still lives there. She was much excited by my agent's questions. She still mourns for her lost son. He could tell her nothing, of course. She may come to Philadelphia to see us."

"I am afraid we can tell her no more," Jack declared.

"The boy can. We must refer her to Dick."

"Excuse us for entering into a private conversation," apologized Jack to the lady. "It is another important matter in which we are interested. You think, then, that Mr. Spencer has been injured by an enemy?"

"I am sure of it!" she responded, excitedly.

"Have you any idea by whom?"

"I cannot say," she answered, more thoughtfully.

"Think a moment. Do you know any one who has expressed enmity, or who has shown an unfriendly feeling to him?"

"None who could have sought to injure him in this way," was her slowly-given answer.

"Perhaps not. We officers have a habit of considering so many little points. Always hoping something may turn up, you know. Will you please name any person who has seemed unfriendly to him?"

"I do not know that he is specially unfriendly,"

reluctantly. "He repeated some slanders against Mr. Spencer, and even used some vague threats. It was but a momentary spleen, though."

"Will you be kind enough to name this person?"

"It was Mr. Andrew Williamson."

"Mr. Williamson?" spoke a quick voice at the door, in a tone of great surprise. "Excuse me," said the speaker, entering. "The girl told me to come right up; and I inadvertently overheard some of your words. What—Miss Andrews?"

"I am just going, Mr. Spencer," she said, rising, while her hand visibly trembled.

"I hope my thoughtless intrusion has not annoyed you. You spoke of slanders against me, and by Mr. Williamson's son?"

"Yes, sir," she replied, reluctantly.

"I know him," he replied. "He has seemed specially friendly to me."

"Who is thl. Mr. Williamson?" asked Jack Bounce, quickly.

"He is an attorney, whose office is at Fourth and Walnut."

"Have you any other known enemies?" asked Jack, as he made a memorandum of the address given him.

"I know of no others."

"You must not take a wrong impression concerning Mr. Williamson," remarked Miss Andrews, with nervous intonation. "I am sorry I used his name. He is a gentleman—hasty and prejudiced, perhaps, but, of course, incapable of anything criminal."

"There are many things of course to young ladies that are not of course to us doubting Thomases," Will Frazer reminded her.

"I must go now. I am obliged to you for your kindness. Good-day, Mr. Spencer."

Will politely opened the door for her. Harry Spencer stood irresolutely for a moment, then—saying hastily to the officers: "I will see you again"—hastened out after her.

Jack Bounce twisted himself round to look at Will, with a comical smile on his face.

"That's a kind of thing that don't often get in our way. A sort of pastoral poem."

"There wasn't much said, but wonderful expression of looks and tones," replied Will, laughing.

"Spencer has a hankering for her, that's sure," declared Jack. "And I fancy her taste runs to Williamson."

"Not a bit of it," and Will spoke indignantly.

"Spencer's her fancy, or I don't know signs. It looks like a case of jealousy with this fellow, Williamson."

"He needs looking after."

"I think so," replied Jack. "If Spencer is innocent, then the man who is working against him is our game."

They were surprised by a third knock at the door, and the reappearance of the irrepressible chambermaid.

"A lady wishes to see Mr. Frazer," she announced.

"Very well. Show her up."

"Hadm't I best rotate?" demanded Jack, laughingly. "When ladies inquire so particularly for Mr. Frazer, a chap of my size might be in the way."

"You can hang round the door long enough to see her," suggested Will, with kind permission. "I should like to have your critical opinion of my taste in ladies."

"I am a harsh critic," averred Jack. "Best turn me out if you wish to escape."

Before Will could reply the door opened, and his new visitor entered.

She was a lady some fifty years of age. She was very richly dressed in black silk, and had about her a striking dignity of manner. In face she had once been very beautiful, and was still a markedly handsome lady. Lines of sadness deeply channeled her face, showing principally about the mouth and the deep-set eyes.

Jack Bounce hastened to hand her a chair.

"Thanks," she replied with dignity of tone.

"Which of these gentlemen is Mr. Frazer?"

"I am he," Will responded.

"You wrote to Boston lately, inquiring about a Mrs. Milton?"

There was an intense feeling in her tone.

"I did," he replied.

"I am Mrs. Milton."

CHAPTER XIX.

AN ANIMATED BARREL.

BACK again to Dick Darling leads the course of our "over true tale."

The parties who had felt so sure of finding him in the old house were obliged to swallow their disappointment as best they could. They stood awhile talking of what they would have done if they had only found him, and debating as to how best to continue their search.

Then one of them went heavily up the stairs. The other two remained talking for a minute.

"Is he in it?"

"No," said Cap. Parker. "He is an agent in another business in which the old man is interested. Be careful with him."

"Of course I will," replied the other. "To-night then."

"At what hour?"

"Midnight. Let us follow. He may suspect something. We will meet here at the time the ghosts walk."

With a laugh he led the way up the stairs, in response to the voice of Joe Turner, who called out:

"What is keeping you two? Going rattin are you? It ain't such a pleas'n't old cellar."

"Taking another look round, that is all," was the reply.

Their footsteps sounded loudly in the empty

rooms above. They seemed to leave the house with reluctance, as if their search had not been complete.

Nor had it been, for light steps echoed their heavy ones, and boyish eyes peered curiously through one of the open windows after the departing men.

"Call round this way when you come back again," cried out Dick, mockingly. "If I ain't to home I'll tell the folks to treat you well—to hot water and pitchforks. Let's see, that's Cap and Bricktop, sure enough, who's t'other? A well-built chap, good-looking, black mustache. Wonder if it ain't the critter that sent the express package?"

Dick's eyes continued to follow them, until they were out of sight from his point of view.

"Good-by. See you ag'in to-night," he said, with a courteous wave of the hand. "I won't go back on the 'pointment, if you don't."

As if thinking that he had had enough of the haunted house for one day, he made his way out.

Dick made his way to the fishing-grounds, where he found the men through with their day's labor, and about partaking of their evening meal.

"I hope you put away the balance of my dinner," called out Dick to the old man who had been so friendly. "Come back to finish it."

"I've a notion you put it away yourself," and the old man gave a hearty laugh. "No matter, we'll give you a fish-bone to pick. You were in the old house?"

"Guess I were."

"See or hear anything?"

They all looked up with interest for the answer.

"Nothin' but moldy walls and rotten floors, dead carrots and cabbage in the cellar, and not the whisk of a mouse's tail about the house to skoroven a cat. It's just the biggest sell of a ghost's country seat I ever run across."

"Don't expect to see anything there by daylight," added another of the men. "Come at night, say about midnight, and see if there won't be enough to take the links out of your hair."

"All right. That'll save combing. Mebbe I'll try it on. Like to see a first-class, prime, A No. 1 ghost. But I'd have him bottled up in lavender and showed round for a curiosity. Were that the supper-bell I heered? Yes, I'll draw right up."

The rough fishermen were amused at Dick's free and easy manner, and at the fresh flavor of his remarks. They attempted to banter him a little at the supper table, but soon found that they had the wrong customer to deal with.

The supper ended, as all suppers must, and Dick, after a general good-by, took his departure in the direction of the neighboring town of Chester, where he spent a few hours investigating the place.

But a later hour of the night found him wending his way back toward the haunted house, whither he will precede him by a few minutes.

It was clear moonlight, the fields seemed bathed in silver, and a rich glow fell upon the rippling waters of the river.

Had any of the hard-worked fishermen but turned their eyes in that direction, they might have seen more than one ghostly figure advance toward the old house, and disappear within its portals.

The two figures which last slipped ghostlike into the old house seemed rather substantial for wandering graveyard sprites, and the tones of their voices had something decidedly human about them. "Are the others in?" asked one, whose voice sounded decidedly like that of Captain Parker.

"Yes; a half-hour ago."

"Well, let's in."

They were now in the cellar, into which the light of the moon dimly penetrated.

They moved on into the square offset already mentioned, within which they disappeared. There was heard a peculiar knocking, and the sound of low voices. Then a creak as of hinges, a quick flash of light, and all grew dim and still again.

But now a strange thing occurred, that might have alarmed even these ghost-makers, had they seen it. The inanimate things in the cellar seemed suddenly to have acquired the functions of life.

The old flour barrel, which had probably lain for years undisturbed and immovable in its corner, suddenly grew restive, and began to glide, with a slow motion and frequent intervals of rest, across the cellar.

Its motion was between a hitch and a glide, but as silently made as beddled a decorous old flour barrel. This strange acrobatic feat continued until the whole length of the cellar was traversed, and the dark corner in its opposite extremity reached. Here it settled down into its former immobility.

Then came a new footstep on the floor above, and a cautious descent into the cellar below.

A substantial-looking specter moved quietly through the faint moonlight, and passed with a quick step into the darker alcove of the cellar, in full view of the ghostly old barrel.

There followed a peculiar system of signals, consisting of successive knocks upon what seemed a hollow portion of the wall, replied to by similar dull-sounding knocks, which seemed to come from within the wall.

A word was now spoken from within, answered by a password from the new-comer.

A creaking sound followed, and the vitalized barrel beheld with wooden wonder a portion of the stone wall, as it appeared, swing open, letting out a quick flash of light from some secret place within.

A faint and peculiar series of sounds were also audible, as the new-comer passed quickly through the opening, and the wall closed and became firm and dark with all night's gloom again.

Something very like a chuckle came from the unseen lips in the comical old barrel, and it sprang into instant life, executing a sort of silent war-dance, or

what might have been a triumphal waltz, across the cellar toward its old location.

It reached there in less time than it had occupied in its former journey, and now, instead of settling down again into the restfulness which should be enjoined by law upon all empty old barrels, it very quietly tipped over, showing the mortal form of a sturdy boy. This individual at once restored his temporary habitation to its former position, and then began a very cautious movement toward the cellar stairs. He soon gained the bottom of the stairs, up which he went until the open air was reached.

The boy now circled very quietly around the house, as if in search of rays of light from some hidden windows.

He then crept with infinite caution through the open moonlight, putting the body of a tree between himself and the haunted house as quickly as possible, and not until he reached the railroad ridge at a considerable distance from the deserted mansion did he pause. Then a ringing laugh came from his lips.

"If this ain't a night's work that's worth a leather medal, then sell me for a king crab!" he ejaculated. "I've got them. They're just like a skeeter between my thumb and finger, and if I don't squeeze the song out of them, then there's no such things as rats. Want Williamson to get in the trap first. Ain't satisfied with the mice while the rat's out. Bet I stonish Ned Hogan, and circumfusticate the two government chaps! Talk about your detectives—Dick Darling don't back down from the best of them."

And with frequent bursts of laughter Dick made the best of his way toward Chester.

CHAPTER XX.

A MEETING ON THE STAIRS.

"One moment, Miss Andrews," called Harry Spencer, as he quickly followed her from the room of the detectives. "I shall not detain you more than a minute. But I must speak to you."

She turned a somewhat fearful face toward him and said:

"Perhaps it is not best, Mr. Spencer."

"And why not? You do not believe me criminal?"

"No! no! I know you are not."

"Come into the parlor a moment," he said, taking her irresolute hand.

Helen's fingers rested softly in his close grasp as he drew her forward to a seat on the sofa, finding no room for himself except very near her.

She quietly withdrew her hand as she queried:

"And now, Mr. Spencer?"

"Is it fair to ask what your errand was with the officers?"

"I would rather not refer to it."

"It concerned me, I know. You wished to inquire about me, you could have had no other errand."

"And if I did? Was it more than friendliness?"

She had unwittingly asked a leading question, to which he hastened to reply:

"Yes, it was more—much more! At least I believe—I hope—why should you interest yourself in me? And that is not all."

"What more is there?"

"You would have concealed it from me. It was but by chance that I heard of it."

"Of what, Mr. Spencer?"

"Of the fact that I owe my liberty to you," he cried enthusiastically. "I have learned that you are the unknown friend who provided my bail. Oh, Helen, can I ever repay you?"

"I could not bear to see my music-teacher go to prison," she softly replied. "I must be going now, Mr. Spencer."

"Give me but a moment more. I was unwittingly an eaves-dropper just now. I heard you speak of Mr. Williamson."

"Yes," she doubtfully replied.

"Is he indeed my enemy? Why is he so?"

"I cannot answer."

"I know him well. He is always so pleasant to me. Why I met him but yesterday, and he was as genial as ever."

"Then he is a hypocrite!" she exclaimed, "for he sought to injure you in my estimation. He has spoken of you as—"

"I know what you mean," he quietly replied. "He refers to a matter which I have had no occasion to mention to you, though I might have been sure some of my kind friends would. I am a gentleman, Miss Andrews, if there is a shadow of doubt upon my birth."

"I know it!" she hastily replied. "I know it well. Far be it from me to permit that to influence me against you. Worth, with me, is better than birth."

Her rapid disclaimer gratified him.

"Mr. Williamson is a suitor of yours?"

"Yes," was the reluctant reply.

"Not a favored one?"

"You are asking too much, sir."

"I know he is not," was his eager rejoinder. "I know it is jealous spite that is influencing him against me. He knew of your lessons with me. He knew—he paused irresolutely, then quickly continued, "He knew that I loved you! But I cannot help saying that I love you—love you with every fiber of my being, every pulse of my soul! And if the prison cell should await me I would go there with you in my soul, yielding the luster of a heaven to the barest dungeon walls."

She made no answer, but suffered her hand to rest in his for several minutes, her face pale and with a scared look. Then an expression of resolution came upon it, and she firmly said:

"While your foes are striving to crush you is not

the time for your friends to desert you. Yet I cannot speak now. I can only say that I am not deeply offended at what you have said."

She rose and quietly departed, he accompanying her to the door with a face of supreme happiness.

But we must leave Mr. Spencer for the present and return to the parlor where Mrs. Milton has just announced herself to the two detectives.

They were somewhat startled on discovering who their lady-visitor was, particularly as it instantly occurred to their minds how ill prepared they were with the information she was likely to desire.

"I did not suppose that you would know of my inquiries," stammered Will Frazer, "or that you would come to Philadelphia on so slight a hope."

"I would go to the ends of the earth on as slight a hope," she responded, with deep feeling. "I heard of the inquiries that were being made. I made your agents tell me their purpose. I learned from them that they were employed by you, and that they personally knew nothing. There were hopes of the recovery of my dear, lost son. Oh, sirs! can you wonder that I hastened here? I that love him with a consuming love! I that have mourned him as worse than dead!"

Her voice shrilled and trembled with the strong feeling that moved her; her eyes looked up with the most heartfelt appeal to the officers.

Jack Bounce twisted himself uneasily in his chair. "I wish we could help you, madam," he blurted out hastily. "I wish we knew more concerning your loss."

"But you know something? You can help me to some clew?" was her eager interruption.

Will Frazer cast a look of angry warning at Jack, as if he would have said: "You are entirely too communicative. You should have helped me work up this case and made what there is in it."

"We are working in this matter for another party," he declared. "You must be aware, Mrs. Milton, that the story of your loss has been widely known. There may be many seeking to take advantage of your desire to find your lost son. Only the most positive evidence should be accepted."

"I know that," she somewhat impatiently answered. "The efforts you speak of have been made. And yet I have a feeling, an impression, that this time the true claimant will arise. The very air seems to me full of the presence of my lost son. I know that he is to be restored to me."

"I sincerely hope so," said Jack. "I am given to following up impressions. It is never safe to neglect them."

"But you have yet told me nothing. You know something. Oh, sirs, do not keep me in suspense."

"Yet we shall have to ask you to wait a few days," put in Will, with a sign to Jack, which the latter had no eyes to see. "We are working up the case. We wrote to Boston simply to know if our investigations were worth continuing."

"Could you doubt it? But you know not how I loved, how I have mourned my son. I am rich. I can well reward those who help me."

"We are not working for money, Mrs. Milton," said Jack, in utter disregard of all Will's looks.

"There is a party who employed us to write that letter. He is not here at present, nor do we have the most remote idea where he is. It may be a week before we see him. In the meantime we are quite ignorant of his purpose in writing."

"Is he so secretive?" she asked, disappointed.

"He is but a boy. But he is a boy that prides himself in keeping his own secrets and in playing his own games."

"And I must wait, then?"

"It cannot be avoided," replied Jack. "Nor have I any idea how much the boy really knows. Be kind enough to leave us your address. We will communicate with you as soon as we have seen him."

"I am stopping at the Continental. But I shall come and see you every day. I shall not be able to endure waiting to hear from you. Who is this lad that knows so much; and that is able to employ experienced detectives?"

The two officers looked at each other, while a comical smile passed between them.

"You would be surprised to see him," responded Jack. "He is a veritable street gamin. How he learned anything about this matter the Lord only knows. But he is just as sharp as a steel-trap, and I would rather trust him than most men."

"I must wait then," she sighed, rising. "I had hoped more from this interview. I hoped too much, perhaps. The ill of a life-time is not to be cured in a day."

The old sad lines returned about her mouth, whence they had been driven by her energy and hopefulness.

"Be sure we will do all we can, Mrs. Milton," declared Jack, as he saw her to the door, and closed it carefully behind her.

Will Frazer's eyes were full of the fire of vexation, as he looked up at his quiet-spoken associate.

"Well, I never saw you display such lack of mother wit before," he angrily exclaimed. "A case like this, that might have had hundreds of dollars in it, thousands, perhaps; and to be flung away by the sharp-witted Jack Bounce, as if it were an apple-woman's trouble."

"There are emotions and misfortunes before which even a detective must grow human. Because letting myself be anything more than fully honest with that poor mother, with twenty years of mourning for her lost child, worn like a cloak of sadness about her, I would jump into the Schuylkill, and put an end to Jack Bounce, at one bounce. That is my answer, Will."

Will had no answer to make, but seemed full of deep thought.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Milton went slowly down stairs.

Near the bottom of the stairs she met a young gentleman coming up.

She lifted her head in a heavy manner, and encountered a pair of brown eyes fixed earnestly upon her. A strange feeling affected her as she looked eagerly into the face before her.

It was unknown to her, yet there was something that set her brain in a whirl which it had not known for many days. Who was it? To whom did those eyes belong? she asked herself continually, as the handsome face photographed itself on her brain, like a picture from the far past.

And Harry Spencer went up the stairs with a feeling like that of the mariner, who has caught a fleeting glimpse of the Fortunate Islands, on which fate forbids him to land.

CHAPTER XXI.

DICK'S CAT GETTING OUT OF THE BAG.

MR. WILLIAMSON was taking a quiet stroll in Chestnut street that same afternoon when his quick eyes encountered a face that gave him a sudden start. He looked again keenly into the fine but sad womanly features before him.

He then quietly turned away. "What here!" he said to himself, in deep surprise. "What could have brought her from Boston? I can think of but one cause: some new illusion about her son."

He followed her until he saw her enter the Continental Hotel.

"So far well," he thought. "She is safe for the present, but I must know what her object is. She cannot be on the true track! I wish Parker was here now. I must write to him at once. And now I had best see Mother Shipton."

This resolution was suddenly taken, and he turned with a rapid step to execute it. Sharp as he was, he had failed to observe two persons who had watched the whole by-play of his recent movements. One of these was Ned Hogan, with his sign hung out in the shape of his inevitable meerschaum. The other was Dick Darling, as well marked by a peculiar feature of his attire. The frequent wettings his new suit had received had proved too much for its powers of resistance. It had shrunk upon him until now the clothes seemed a part of his skin, and the unsolved mystery was how he had got into them, and how he was ever going to get out of them. Dick could not have answered himself, as he had not been out of his clothes since his last two dips overboard.

"Now's our time," he said, quickly. "That cove's my game. Wish I knewed who the woman was. Let's arter him; there's somethin' afoot."

"Who is he, Dick?" asked Hogan, anxiously, as he followed the eager boy down the opposite side of the street to that pursued by Williamson.

"He's the bit of bacon that I've got in my pickle barrel, and that I'm going to salt down, sure. I won't sell nobody that I ain't bought and paid for, Hogan, but I kalkerlate I'll soon own this chap."

"Is he one of the men whom you fancy to be connected with the counterfeiting business?"

"Yes. And with another bizness that's about as deep and wide. It's gettin' ripe. I'll be ready to knock my apples off the tree in a day or two."

"I hope you are not making a fool of me, Dick," warned Hogan, doubtfully. "If you are, I'll be burst if I don't smash my pipe over your head."

"All right, Ned Hogan. I'll give you some p'int's before half-an-hour that mought open your eyes. Did you ever see sich a fit as them trowsers?"

Dick indeed had some trouble in his locomotion. Hogan laughed as he looked down at the boy's attenuated legs.

"How are you ever going to get them off, Dick?"

"That's what's a-troublin' me," confessed Dick, dubiously. "Feared I'll have to be melted down and run outter them."

They had now kept within full view of Williamson for several squares. The streets here became less frequented and they found it advisable to fall further back, barely keeping him in sight.

"We are on the track of somethin'," announced Dick. "I've followed this cove twenty times afore, and I've noticed whenever he's on some deep lay, he's jist as cautious as a fox. Look how he keeps his eyes goin'. He cotched me once at it. Bet he don't again."

They were now in a very disreputable part of the city. There were here a number of small streets noted for the horrible filth and iniquity of their inmates—the leprous spot in a great city.

Williamson turned quickly into one of these side streets, after glancing warily around. His two pursuers ran rapidly forward to the corner of the street in which he had disappeared.

He was just entering a tumble-down frame house—or but would be a better name—about half-way down the street.

"You stay here, Dick," said Hogan. "I will find out who lives there."

He advanced and entered into conversation with the officer who had charge of this unpleasant beat. It was ten minutes before he returned.

"I'll swear I don't know what a well-dressed man like him wants in such a hole," he averred.

"Mebbe I know who lives there!" answered Dick. "Oh, an outrageous old crone, whom the folks in these parts christen Mother Shipton. She makes her money by begging, or generally by sending some baby out to whine for her. She is said to be never short of a new baby, if one happens to drop off."

"Then she's my meat!" cried Dick, joyfully. "It's a hundred-dollar job we've struck to-day. I'll let you inter what I'm arter soon, Hogan. Jist take another short walk with me."

Ned grew somewhat restive over Dick's persistent

mysteriousness. But he was excessively anxious to know what the boy was after, and Dick would not let out a word; so he perforce accompanied him.

Their way led now to Arch street, and ended at the hotel patronized by the government detectives. "Misters Bounce and Frazer in?" asked Dick, in his independent manner, of the clerk.

"I don't know," was that individual's short answer. "You might find them in their room."

"Come ahead, then, Hogan. I've blazed the way before."

"Who are these men, Dick?" asked Hogan, as they ascended the stairs.

"A brace of government chaps. You oughter know them."

"But what do you want with them?"

"Why you don't kalkerlate I kin put all my jobs through with one? Got too much bizness on hand for that. Things is gettin' ripe, Hogan; that's why I'm goin' to interduce you. Want you all now."

Before Hogan could ask any more questions, Dick had abruptly opened the door of the parlor in question, and walked in, suddenly breaking off a close conference between Harry Spencer and the officers.

"Back ag'in, you see," was his free-and-easy greeting. "How do, Mr. Spencer? Didn't 'spect to meet you here."

"I wish you had been back a half-hour sooner," said Jack.

"What for?—but stop jist a minit. Want to interduce you to Mr. Edward Hogan. He's one of Pinkerton's—Mr. Hogan, this is Mr. Jack Bounce and Mr. Will Frazer; two gen'lmen in government service. Hope you'll know one another."

This introduction was made with great grandiloquence of tone, and a graceful wave of the hand.

Dick, however, hardly gave them time to acknowledge his formal introduction before he was at them again with questions.

"What did you want me for a half an hour ago?"

"The Boston party—"

"There, that will do. Drop it right there," ejaculated Dick, with a quick glance at Spencer. "The Bosting job will keep. Tain't that we're runnin' now. Got a little pressin' bizness with you officers. Ain't interruptin' you?" he asked Harry.

"No. We were about through," replied the latter, with a smile at Dick's peremptory manner.

"When does that little affair come up?"

"What little affair?" asked Harry, in surprise.

"You oughter know, as long as it's your job—that little trial bizness."

"Oh! my trial? Now, I was ridiculous enough to fancy that a matter of some importance."

"Yes; folks will be ridic'ous," was Dick's cool reply. "Tain't much 'longside some jobs I'm runnin'."

"That trifling affair will take place to-morrow," confessed Harry.

"The blazes it will!" was Dick's energetic answer. "That won't do, no how. Can't you boost her over? Slide her on a few days more? 'Spect to have some witnesses for you, but ain't got them ready yet."

"It might be done," returned Harry, smiling. "The courts will not stand long over so small a matter."

"Do your putiest," demanded Dick, positively.

"You'll find I ain't in fun. I've got the trumps in my hand to save you from Cherry Hill; but they ain't quite ready to play yet."

"I shall do my best, then, Dick."

As soon as the door closed Dick turned to the officers.

"Now let's hear 'bout Bosting," he said. "Didn't want Harry Spencer to hear it."

"Boston is all right," answered Jack. "Mrs. Milton has been found; and what is more, she is here now, and anxious to have an interview with you."

"That's the way with wimmen; they're too cur'us. Why couldn't she stay till she was sent for? You jist tell Mrs. Milton that I ain't visib'le yet. An' tell her, if she wants to amuse herself waitin', she mought 'tend the trial of one Harry Spencer for counterfeitin'. Tell her to keep her eyes open and see if she reckermises anybody in the court."

"All right," said Jack.

"And now to biz."

He helped himself to a chair beside the center-table, and deliberately drew several papers from his pocket, which he spread out upon the table.

"Look at that, Ned Hogan. Ever see it afore?"

It was the torn envelope of a letter he pushed toward Hogan.

"Why, it is addressed to me," cried the latter.

"That's so. Know the writin'?"

"It is familiar. Yes, it is the envelope of the letter I received from Chester, telling me that Harry Spencer would go there the next day, and have a conference with a red-haired man. This was the first hint of his being connected with the counterfeits. The letter put me on his track."

"And the envelope put me on a better track. It was a sharp game they played to send him on a fool's errand to Chester, and you after him; and while he was gone old Sol Sly, of South street, stuffed a pack of counterfeits in his drawers. You see, I twig the whole game."

The officers looked at each other, with the light of a dawning intelligence in their eyes.

"And how about the medal that you say Sol stole?" asked Will.

"Got it here," responded Dick, tapping his pocket.

"Worked the traverse on them."

"Spencer had a long conference with the red-haired man at Chester," Hogan declared.

"Know all about that," interrupted Dick.

"Tweren't counterfeitin'. Tell you sometime, soon, what 'twas about."

"Very well. Come back to the envelope, then."

"You folks oughter be good judges of writin'. Put that and that together, and see what you make of them."

He pushed an open letter beside the envelope.

The officers bent closely over them for a minute.

"They are undoubtedly the same handwriting," declared Jack, in a positive manner. "There is no attempt at disguise here."

"There was in the letter, though," said Dick. "S'pose he thought nobody'd save an old envelope. Didn't know Dick Darling was 'bout."

"Go on, Dick. This is getting interesting."

"Got a little story to tell you," and Dick spread himself before the three curious officers. "You see I knowed Harry Spencer, and when I see'd that letter tryin' to git him snatched, I bet to myself it was writ by one of the gang—one that didn't like him."

Now I happened in a stationery store in Chestnut street, a day or two afore, when a stranger come in to order some paper. He took some envelopes with him that had a curious water mark. I know they talked a good deal 'bout it, and he wanted the paper of the same kind. Jist hold that envelope ag'in the light."

"I see," said Jack: "an eagle with a serpent in his claws."

"Precise! Wonder if I won't turn out the eagle and him the snake. When Ned Hogan got the letter, I see'd that the envelope looked like the same; so I jist looked through it, and twigged the eagle and snake."

"And what followed?"

"I did—I folloed to the stationery store, and folloed him off with the paper. He shook me, but I got on a lay that pulled me through. I found he were a friend of Sol Sly, and that he were after the same gal with Harry Spencer. And I knowed that jealousy was a reg'lar tiger. Been to the theater, and seen Otheller."

"And there got your education in jealousy," suggested Jack, with a laugh.

"Got some p'int's," retorted Dick, in a dignified tone. "Well, I got you to write to that gen'lman and 'point a interview. Only wanted his hand-writin'. That's it."

"And who is Andrew Williamson?" asked Will, his eyes full of absorbing interest.

"He's a lawyer at Fourth and Walnut. And that ain't all. He's head cook of these counterfeits, or else I'm the cheapest sold Jack that ever went off for a penny."

"You haven't told all you know?"

"Not by a jug full. I'm only waitin' to nail Andy Williamson so tight that the law can't drag him through. I know the head-quarters of the gang is at Chester. I know he got a package of notes by express from Chester, which he set adrift on the market. And, finery, I know jist where the queer stuff is manufactured, and I'm only waitin' for the king bee to get in the hive afore I snatch the whole caboodle."

Dick had risen to his feet as he approached this climax, and his last sentence was given with a grandiloquent eloquence that would have shamed the best of curb-stone orators.

"Well, if this is true," cried Hogan, with excited energy, "I'll be hanged if the boy isn't worth a dozen of us old stagers!"

"True! Got any doubt of it?" asked Dick, appealing to the government officers.

"As you tell it, Dick, I feel as if you are indeed on the track," declared Jack Bounce.

"I'm on it so sound that a dozen locomotives couldn't knock me off. That's what I want Spencer's trial put off for. Want to wait till Williamson goes to Chester, and then spring the trap on the whole gang. And I want you three folks, and about half a dozen more, to take a hand in it. Best bring a few bullets, and a trifle of gunpowder too. It'll maybe be hot work."

"I tell you what," put in Will Frazer, quickly, "there's the steam yacht at the Navy Yard. I can get the use of that and its crew."

"That's the dodge!" cried Dick, with a joyful intonation. "Want you to bespeak it this very day. Can't tell what night we mought want it. When the iron get's hot we've got to strike. And hard, too."

"All right. I shall see that it is ready."

"And now, feller-citizens," said Dick, with a comical look at his garments, "I ain't been in the bosom of my family for a week, and ain't had these trowsers off for 'bout the same time. Want to get a good holt with my bootjack up 'bout my waist, and see if I can't peel."

"Those clothes are not fit for you to wear, Dick," suggested Jack, after the laugh had subsided. "Why don't you get a new pair of pants?"

"Ain't got no generous friend in the clothin' line," responded Dick. "And money's kinder run down with me."

"Oh! that's the state of affairs! Here is a ten, Dick. Help yourself to a new rig."

Dick took the money with scant thanks, and he departed, leaving the officers in a deep consultation.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE SIGNAL GIVEN.

DICK'S desires and Harry Spencer's efforts were not crowned with success. No reason satisfactory to the court could be given why the trial should be postponed, as Dick's true reasons were jewels too precious to be given to the public.

The case was therefore called in due order on the day at first named for it.

The court-room was well filled, as a great deal of public interest had been excited by the mystery of these dangerous counterfeits, so persistently placed upon the market.

The case for the prosecution was very simple. Ned Hogan was the chief witness, as having arrested

Spencer and found in his private drawers the package of counterfeit notes which were such serious evidence against him. Then there was the journey to Chester, and the letter which pointed so closely at a guilty connivance with the forgers.

Harry's lawyer had not succeeded in getting all the rebutting evidence he should have had. He had not sought it in the right quarters, and knew nothing of the whereabouts of the red-haired man, who was so prominently mixed up in the affair, nor of the temporary arrest of Sol Sly for his strange proceedings in Spencer's house.

Hogan, of course, was aware of all these facts, but was not at liberty to divulge them while Dick's plans hung fire, as they at present did.

The case was not called till the afternoon session of the court, and would evidently not be finished that day, as the witnesses for the prosecution were examined and cross-examined at great length.

During its progress Jack Bounce entered, accompanied by Mrs. Milton, whom he succeeded in helping to a comfortable seat in the rear portion of the court-room.

Near by her was another well-dressed, young-looking lady, so deeply veiled that no feature of her face could be distinguished, but who seemed to take an absorbing interest in the prisoner and in the evidence.

Jack had only partly obeyed Dick's directions. He had not told Mrs. Milton for what purpose he brought her here, simply saying he had been requested to do so by the party who had employed him. He preferred to see it she would discover anything without previously formed expectations.

But in that crowded room it was not likely that she could aimlessly select any familiar face. She sat looking with little interest on the assemblage, and listened with less interest to the evidence.

"Why have you brought me here?" she asked, at length, of her escort. "This is very wearisome to me."

"I can't say," Jack stolidly replied. "I am only obeying orders. Look about the room a bit and you may find something to interest you."

It was with a sad smile that she followed his directions, her eyes wandering in a desultory fashion over the oddly diversified faces that made up the audience of the court-room.

Jack was listening to some prolix statements, of no possible importance, drawn from a witness by persistent questioning of the lawyer, when he felt a sudden, almost fierce, clasp upon his arm, and heard a quick whisper in his ear.

"Who is that?" The words were given in a sort of gasp.

"Where?" he asked, following the direction of her pointing finger.

"There! behind the railing."

"That is Harry Spencer, the prisoner, the party who is being tried."

"But who is he? His face thrills me with such a strange feeling! Can it be—" she paused, while her eyes eagerly devoured every lineament of his face.

"He is a music-teacher by profession," explained Jack. "He has fallen into trouble, though I fully believe him innocent."

"Innocent! Could guilt rest there?" pointing earnestly to the open and ingenuous face of the prisoner. "But you know more of him. I met him on your stairs yesterday. I felt then that he must be my lost son. I seem to gaze upon my husband, restored to life and to youth again."

"I know nothing more," returned Jack, evasively, "and did not dream that he had any connection with you."

This persistent whispering was beginning to annoy the court, and the crier sternly demanded silence.

Mrs. Milton said no more, but she had suddenly acquired the deepest interest in the case, and her eyes continued to rest on the face of the prisoner with a devouring intensity.

The hour of three came, and passed, and the case for the prosecution was just ended. Under these circumstances the judge adjourned the court, giving the defense until the next day to prepare their evidence in rebuttal.

Mr. Williamson had been in court during most of the hearing of the case, occupying a chair in the lawyer's inclosure, and a deeply interested auditor of the evidence. His keen eyes occasionally rested on the face of the prisoner, with a problematical look. It would have been difficult to tell, from his expression, which side of the case he favored.

He looked frequently at his watch, with a slight show of annoyance, and at length rose and quickly left the room, an hour before the adjournment, as if some imperative engagement called him away.

Yet there was a look of satisfaction upon his face.

"It is going against him," he muttered. "They cannot overthrow the evidence of those notes. Helen was there. Her veil could not hide her from me. Yet I fancy she cannot continue her infatuation for a convicted felon. Harry Spencer has been in my way, in more modes than one. And the ridiculous boy thinks me his friend! He little knows that a friend with an interest in your disappearance is tenfold more dangerous than an open foe."

He little knew that a concealed foe was on his own track at that moment. A keen-looking boy had left the court-room immediately behind him, with a look of equal satisfaction with his own.

"It's ripenin'!" he thought, with a confident air. "The fox don't leave his goose 'cept there's somethin' mighty stirrin' in the air. Bet high he's streakin' for Chester; and he don't go down there only on one bizzness. It'll be queer if we don't carry off Harry Spencer on our shoulders to-morrow."

And Dick followed his prey with all the keenness of a sleuth-hound, no double or turn sufficing to throw him from the trail.

The court-room was nearly emptied ere Mrs. Milton could remove her eyes from the face which had so deeply engrossed her. She turned away with a deep sigh, and left the room, accompanied by her escort.

"What will they do with him?" she quietly asked.

"Will they send him to prison?"

There was deep feeling in her quiet voice.

"They cannot, since they have accepted bail for his appearance," answered Jack, though not at all sure in his mind whether the alderman's bail-bond would be respected by the court at this serious stage of the case.

They had not gone far before he was arrested by the touch of a trembling hand upon his sleeve.

He turned to behold a deeply-veiled lady.

"Will you please tell me your opinion?" she timidly asked. "I know so little of such matters. Is the evidence against him?"

"So far it looks so."

"It is all very dark to me. It seems terrible."

"You have heard but one side, Miss Andrews," said Jack, kindly. "In court business you can only judge after both sides have been heard. I hope for the best."

Yet there was a shadow of anxiety in his tone which he could not conceal.

"Who is this lady who is so deeply interested in the accused?" asked Mrs. Milton.

"Miss Andrews, a young lady friend of his," answered Jack. "Miss Andrews, let me make you acquainted with Mrs. Milton, a Boston lady who is here on a very important errand."

"I am in search of a long-lost son," explained Mrs. Milton, gravely. "I know not what, but there is something in the accused that has stirred my soul more deeply with hope than aught I have met in the whole twenty years of my bereavement."

Helen looked with interest on the saddened face of the mother, as she threw back the thick veil which had concealed her own features.

"There is some mystery about Mr. Spencer's birth!" she cried, eagerly. "He knows not who were his parents!"

Mrs. Milton looked with an intense glance into the sweet, eager, beautiful face before her, now lit up with such a hopeful earnestness.

"Can it be?" she cried. "Oh! I know, I feel that it is! He is—he must be—my dear, my long-lost son!"

"I hope it may prove so," answered Helen, in her kindest tone. "I know nothing of his early history."

Jack's attention was at this moment called by another touch upon his arm. It was the small, shrewd face of Dick Darling that now appeared at his shoulder, but full of an eager light.

"Tell Will Frazer to fire up the yacht *Instantan*!" he commanded, in a deep whisper. "The music's goin'. The fox has headed for his hole, and it's 'bout time the hounds were out. You must be on the river by dark. If things go right we'll bag the whole gang."

"That's good news! One minute, Dick."

He turned to the ladies, who had entered into an animated conversation.

"It is all right," he said, joyfully. "Harry Spencer will be cleared. We will have evidence to-morrow morning, if all goes well, that will utterly turn the tables on his enemies."

"Oh! I hope it may prove so!" cried Helen, with clasped hands.

Say not a word of this; particularly not to Mr. Williamson, if you should see him. A word might defeat all our plans."

"Do not fear, sir. You can depend on my silence."

"Better depended on his own," muttered Dick, discontentedly. "I don't like young folks, 'ticularly young wimmen folks, brung into bizzness of mine."

"Why, you are not such a patriarch yourself, Master Richard," said Helen, with a musical laugh.

"I've 'arnt a thing or two, anyhow. Don't back down afore most men—I don't."

"I don't know but what I had best do something to relieve your suspense, Mrs. Milton," now announced Jack, in a decided tone. "This antiquated young gentleman is our employer in your affairs."

"This boy?" and Mrs. Milton looked with doubtful eyes upon Dick.

Yet the young detective never looked better. He was attired in a new, and, for once, a well-fitting suit of clothes. His face had been washed to the point of polishing, and it was astonishing what a good-looking butterfly had emerged from a very plain chrysalis.

"This Mrs. Milton?" demanded Dick.

"Yes."

"Got some bizzness with you, ma'am. Not to-day though. Got too big a job on hand to-day to take in any more work."

"Do you know anything concerning me?" she inquired, doubtfully. "I trust my hopes have not been raised in vain. Can you give me any assurance?"

"Guess I know the lay I'm on," answered Dick, a little offended. "Won't say nothin' to-day. That's sot. But maybe you'll reckernise this."

He held up in his hand the medal, with its curious chain.

"Great Heaven!" cried the mother, snatching it from his hand. "It is my son's! Oh, sir! where is he? Take me to him and you shall receive a mother's deepest blessings."

"They'll keep till to-morrow," announced Dick positively. "This is a bizzness that can't be put through in a minit, and in a public place like Independence Square. Come, Mr. Bounce. Our bizzness

won't wait. We must leave the ladies. Mrs. Milton kin keep the medal till I see her ag'in. Be mighty keeful of it."

"Thank you," said the deeply affected mother, seizing and pressing his hand warmly. "You have given me more happiness than I have felt for a lifetime."

"You kin save your thanks till to-morrow, Miss Helen," suggested Dick. "When I git your lover out of his scrape."

And the irrepressible boy hurried Jack off, leaving the young lady's cheeks dyed with deep blushes.

We will not here enter into the details of the long conference that ensued between Dick and his trio of detectives.

Suffice it to say that as a consequence thereof a small, swift steam yacht, known as the *Lightfoot*, stole quietly out of the Navy Yard at about the hour of nine that evening, and moved slowly down the river.

The moon was not yet up, and would not be until near midnight, and the waters lay dark under the glimmer of a thousand twinkling stars, as the boat plowed her way slowly along, with no evidence of haste in her deliberate movements.

There were on board our three officers, and six or eight other persons, but no trace of Dick Darling.

The night was far advanced toward midnight when they arrived at a point in the river at a short distance above Chester, and slowly steamed up and down, well out from shore, their eyes fixed keenly upon the land.

"Ain't it high time we were hearing from our scout?" asked Hogan, impatiently, as a clock on board struck the hour of twelve.

"Dick's likely waiting to get all his birds in the cage," Jack explained.

A half-hour more passed of this uneasy suspense and then there appeared on shore a faint flash, as of a match which had been lit and instantly extinguished. Again, and again, the flash broke out.

"That's the signal!" cried Jack, joyfully. "Put her head ashore!"

In ten minutes more they had all landed on the low wharf at the fisheries, the suddenly awakened fisherman starting up in wonder.

"That's your sort!" cried Dick Darling, suddenly appearing from the gloom. "Foller me! But as silent as a regiment of mice!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

A BIG HAUL.

The silver rim of the moon had lifted itself, a half-hour before, above the dark Jersey horizon, and it now poured its mist-shrouded beams in a faint flood upon the restless surface of the river, and lit up the fore-ground with a dim luster that brought out all objects in relief.

"Don't you be bothering yourselves," cried Dick to the fishermen. "Tain't shad we're arter, *this* time. But maybe one of your *nets* mought come in handy, for 'spect to make a haul of big fish; reg'lar sturgeons of fellers. We're goin' for the ghosts."

"Best keep clear of them," cried Dick's old friend as the shadowy line of the yacht's crew filed past.

"They ain't canny things to play with."

"Oh! don't you be feared," called back Dick.

"Guess we've got some med'cine here that'll cure the old house of its bad sperits."

Cautiously the dark line moved toward the deserted mansion, which rose, magnified by the faint moonlight, like a dun castle upon their path.

"Got them bagged," whispered Dick to the officers.

"The whole caboodle. Been on the watch ever since dark."

The portal of the haunted house was reached. The empty rooms glowed with a forbidding look upon the intruders. It appeared indeed as if hobgoblins might select this place as one suited to their natures and in which they might pursue their revels undisturbed.

After some last whispered directions to his followers, the chief of which was an injunction to silence and to be ready with their weapons, Dick led the way forward.

The rooms were too dark for strangers to make their way with the caution necessary, and the light of a dark-lantern was flashed forward along the hall, illuminating the narrow track along which they were slowly creeping.

"Careful!" whispered Dick. "Here's the stairs we're to go down. They're slippery. Put your feet down hard, but not noisy."

He led the way as silently as a specter. In fact, if any of the occasional visitors to the ghost-ridden mansion had been now present, they would have vowed they saw a host of its uncanny inmates, moving onward like shadows, without the sound of a footfall.

The cellar reached, Dick grew doubly cautious. Marshaling his hosts he enjoined them to have their weapons ready, and then led them into the dark alcove in which lay the door to the secret room.

Taking the lantern he searched along the wall in which he had seen the door opened. It seemed all alike, a series of roughly-squared stones, with a mortar between. The door was so deftly made that no one without previous reasons for suspicion would have deemed that it was a mere imitation of the wall before which Dick now paused.

There was a slight line running irregularly up and down between the apparent layers of stone, to all appearance an old crack in the wall.

But the shrewd boy who now stood before it had the best of reasons for knowing better. Making a sign of caution and readiness to his followers, he took a short crowbar from the hands of the nearest of the men. He then closed the lantern and handed it back to the same man.

They were now in almost utter darkness. Silence.

too, twin-born with darkness, reigned around them. Yet now there was a faint sound that seemed to come through the wall, a sound no more obtrusive, except to sharpened senses, than was the excessively faint suspicion of moonlight that penetrated to those gloomy depths.

Their alert ears were startled when Dick, with the end of the bar, gave two slight knocks upon the concealed door. All remained silent. Even the faint sounds they had heard ceased to be audible.

Again he signaled; this time with four knocks given in deliberate succession. So far there had not been a particle of positive evidence to Dick's followers that they had not been made fools of. They had seen nor heard nothing definite, and only had his story to base their faith upon.

Yet they were worked up with expectation of some striking denouement, worked up more by his mystery and caution, and the excitement to which the present surroundings had wrought them, than by any satisfactory knowledge.

This doubtfulness was sharply dispelled. From within the wall, in answer to Dick's second signal, came the faint sound of two blows, as audible as a pistol-shot would have been to their acute senses.

Dick's reply was with two similarly given blows. A moment's silence. Then the tones of a voice were heard. It seemed to come through miles of earth, so faint and far-off was the sound. Yet the words were perfectly distinct.

"Who goes?"

"Silence," answered Dick, with his lips close to the door.

The next moment there came a kind of crackling sound. A line of light broke through the apparent crack in the walls. The mysterious door was thrown half-open, letting out a sudden flash, and revealing to the eyes of the observers a number of human forms within a well-lighted room beyond.

There followed a quick exclamation, and a hasty effort to close the door. But Dick had his crowbar inserted in the opening, and the closing portal caught on the cold iron.

"Quick! Take hold!" cried Dick, with abrupt energy. They may have some other way out."

A half-dozen hands caught the partly open door, flinging it open so suddenly that the man who had been holding it from within was flung abruptly out against the opposite wall.

The scene within was a striking one. It was a room of some twenty by ten feet in dimensions, a portion of it being occupied by a table, which was covered by engraver's tools, with steel plates finely cut, and with quantities of printed bank-notes. In another portion was a hand printing machine; in another a small forge. In fact, every necessary detail of their nefarious business surrounded the group of men, who had sprung up in startled surprise at this abrupt invasion of their domain.

Several oil-lamps depended from the ceiling, their light shining on faces pallid with sudden fright. And well might they be, for they looked into the muzzles of a dozen revolvers, and into as many resolute faces behind them.

"At them, men! Fire on them! Burst through them!" cried one of the counterfeiters, a handsome, determined-looking man. "On your lives, don't be captured!"

He sprang to the side of the room, out of sight of the officers.

"At them!" yelled Dick. "Give them a dose of bullets to learn them sense! Dash for them afore they kin fire!"

He dashed forward himself, flourishing his crowbar, and followed by the reports of a number of pistols, whose bullets pattered warningly against the opposite wall.

The counterfeiters were too much taken by surprise to be in a position for self-defense. The door-keeper was already captured. Two or three of the others drew pistols, and with oaths sprang forward.

But Dick's followers had crowded resolutely after him into the room. They were two to one of the forgers. Before the latter could make any concerted movement for defense, they were surrounded and seized by stalwart men. Several more harmless shots were fired, yet the whole affair had passed so quickly that the criminals had not time to recover from their surprise. Scarce a minute had elapsed since Dick's inserting his bar in the opening of the door until they were in the hands of their greatly outnumbering antagonists, who lost no time in securely binding their dangerous captives.

"How's this?" cried Dick, suddenly. "There was six fish in the pond, and there's only four in the net. Where's Andy Williamson and Cap. Parker?"

"Williamson?" asked Jack Bounce. "Yes, that's the chap that told them to fight. And he's out stick himself."

Dick looked hastily around for means of escape.

"Here it is!" cried one of the men. "Up the big chimney here! There's a ladder in it."

"By thunder, that's so!" yelled Dick. "Out with you! Tumble out! Roll out! If they git away, we'll be the cheapest sold coons ever brung to market."

Dick set the example by dashing into the outer cellar, and going up the stairs three at a step.

He was followed closely by the others, except such as had charge of the prisoners.

But quick as they had been the fleeing criminals had been quicker. They had already escaped from the house, and were dimly visible in the misty moonlight about two hundred yards off across the fields.

"After them!" cried Ned Hogan, eagerly. "We can catch them yet!"

"You can't do it," cried Dick. "Back! all of you. Let Hogan follow them. We've better fish to fry."

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Will Frazer, in harsh revolt from Dick's leadership.

"I mean this," returned Dick, decidedly. "I'm runnin' this machine, and I know what's what. Do you s'pose you could beat them to Chester? You couldn't do it. There they've got the yacht Molly, and I'll be off shore quicker'n greased lightning. How'll ye better them then? Swim for them, hey?"

"What better?" asked Will, sternly. "What's better? Why, the steamer. Hogan's the chap for them if they try to double in Chester. He'll get help enough. The steamer's our game."

"Right as a trivet, Dick," put in Jack, slapping him heartily on the shoulder. "Put your prisoners on board, under hatches."

"Jist so. Let Mr. Frazer and one or two men stay here, and look after the plunder. The rest of us—"

"Will take to the Lightfoot, and then, hey for the Molly!" cried Jack.

Dick's ideas were at once put into effect. The prisoners were brought up and secured on board the steamer. Will Frazer willingly agreed to the part of the programme marked out for him by Dick. The others hurried on board.

The moon broke clearly from her misty veil, and poured a strong light upon the rippling river, as the steamer moved out into the broad stream.

With a full head of steam, the light craft made rapid head ay down the river, keeping close in shore as the channel would admit.

They were yet a quarter of a mile above the Chester pier when they saw what appeared in the moonlight a great-winged bird, wheel suddenly out into the stream, and commence a rapid flight down the river.

"It's the Molly!" announced Dick excitedly; "and she's got jist her wings. Let out, lads. Burn rosin, or coal fire, if wood won't answer."

In a very few minutes they swept past the head of Chester pier. A solitary, dark figure stood there, looking out upon their approach.

"That you, Ned?" called out Jack.

"Ay! ay!" came from the hoarse voice of Hogan.

"That's the Molly?"

"Ay! ay!"

"Our game abroad?"

"Yes; dried and salted! Go for them. If you come back short-handed, put your own heads in pickle."

"We'll fetch them, or burst!" cried Dick, energetically, as they swept rapidly past the pier.

And now in utter silence the chase continued, the swift-moving steamer rapidly closing up the distance between the two vessels. The Molly made a brave effort to escape, loading herself with sails until she bowed deeply before the rising wind.

But she was far overmatched in speed, and it was not many minutes before the dark prow of the steamer forged rapidly up upon her quarter.

Until then deep silence had been preserved on both sides. Now a stern voice came from the deck of the Molly.

"What do you mean by this chase? Draw off, or it will be worse for you!"

"Nary draw," came from Dick's saucy lips.

"Back water, or I'll fire!"

"Fire and be blowed!" was Jack Bounce's energetic rejoinder.

The speaker was as good as his word. A bullet ranged the deck of the steamer, fortunately doing no damage.

In a minute more the two vessels were firmly clasped together by means of boat-hooks.

"Now we'll answer your shot!" cried Jack, as he leaped aboard the Molly.

The tall form of Williamson confronted him, pistol in hand, and a dangerous look in his eye.

He took a quick aim and pulled the trigger. It would have fared ill with Jack Bounce at that moment but that a light form had leaped on board beside him, and threw up the pistol-arm of the desperate man.

The bullet sped far above the head of the officer. Before the shot could be repeated Jack's stalwart fist had struck the villain a square blow in the face. He went down like an ox before the ax of the butcher.

Cap. Parker rushed to the defense of his associate, but only to find himself in the hands of vigorous foes.

There was a moment's severe struggle, for Joe Turner and the crew of the yacht rushed with hastily-seized weapons to the aid of their leader. Williamson, too, had risen on his elbow and was again leveling his pistol.

"At them, lads!" shouted Dick. "You back down, brick-top, or it'll be wuss for you. I owe you one, Cap. Parker."

And with a quick, skillful trip, the agile boy knocked Parker's legs from under him. He fell heavily across Williamson, knocking the pistol from the villain's hands.

"That's your sort!" yelled Dick. "Tie them, every critter of them! Put them with their friends aboard the Lightfoot."

This advice was speedily followed, Williamson submitting in sullen silence. In five minutes more the two vessels were put about, and headed up the moonlit river.

CHAPTER XXIV.

DICK'S EVIDENCE.

It was the day succeeding that in which such stirring and important events had occurred. The trial of Harry Spencer had been resumed, and had gone on for an hour with a rather lame line of defense.

The valued lady auditor of the previous day had resumed her position, and was a deeply-interested lis-

tener to the somewhat prolix case, the lawyer ekeing out the thinness of his testimony by a multitude of questions.

At this stage of the case the door of the courtroom opened, and three or four men pushed themselves into the already crowded room.

One of these made his way to the legal inclosure. At that moment the counsel for the defense was unoccupied, the opposite lawyer having taken up the witness.

The stranger, who was no other than Jack Bounce, sat and whispered eagerly for several minutes with the lawyer. The latter lost all interest in the cross-questioning, and his face lit up with a new light.

"That will do," he said to the witness, just released from the badgering of the Commonwealth's attorney.

He turned and spoke to the crier, whose voice rung out through the courtroom:

"Solomon Sly!"

There was a movement near the door of the courtroom, and the attenuated form of the Jew could be seen slowly making his way to the witness stand. He was somewhat pale, and his hand trembled as he laid it upon the railing. Jack Bounce fixed his eyes upon him with a stern glance, which seemed to hold the witness in awe.

After the preliminary questioning, the question was asked:

"Were you not alone in Mr. Spencer's house on the afternoon of April 4th?"

"I called to see him," said the witness, reluctantly. "He was not in."

"Were you left alone in the parlor?"

"Yes, the girl thought he might be in soon."

"How did you occupy yourself while there?"

"Looking over a book," responded the witness, hesitatingly.

"Speak plainly, sir; you will save yourself from worse trouble hereafter. Did you remain in the parlor?"

"No, sir," protested the witness, growing still paler.

"Where did you go?"

"To a small room that had a bookcase and desk. It seemed used as an office."

"What did you do while there?"

The witness hesitated and stammered. He seemed unable to speak. Jack Bounce transfixed him with the keen light of his eyes.

"Did you put anything in the desk?"

"Yes," stammered the witness.

"What was it?"

"A package of papers."

"Of counterfeit bank-notes?"

"I cannot say. I did not examine it."

"For what purpose was it put there?"

"I was ordered to do so."

"By whom?"

The witness again hesitated.

Jack Bounce spoke rapidly for a moment with the lawyer.

"That will do," he said, suddenly, turning to the witness. "You may go down now; but remain in the court. You will probably be wanted again."

The deepest interest was now manifested in the case. These few answers had put such a different aspect upon it that it was evident to all that the accused was the victim of a conspiracy.

"Richard Darling!" called the crier.

"Here," echoed a distant voice, and the small form of Dick could be seen making his way to the witness stand.

There was considerable surprise felt by those present at the unusual course taken by the counsel for the defense. To have such a witness as Solomon Sly in his hands, and to suddenly drop him at the very commencement of his testimony, must have been done for some important reason; and the evidence of the next witness was eagerly waited for.

Dick came up with his peculiar walk, which was not quite a swagger, yet was full of the spirit of independence.

"Will you swear or affirm?" asked the clerk.

"Ain't much given to swearin'," declared Dick. "S'pose I mought strain a pint this once."

The oath was administered amid a restrained disposition to laugh in the audience.

"What is your name?" asked the lawyer.

"You oughter know. That feller jist sung it out. Don't sign myself with my Sunday name much, though. I'm generally Dick Darling!"

"Where do you reside?"

"Where do I hang out, do you mean? 'Most anywhere. A cellar door's a comfortable bed this hot weather. And I pick up my vittals indiscriminate."

"But you have some home. I wish the street and number of your residence."

"It is home where the heart is," replied Dick.

"Mine's 'most anywhere where there's a bit of fun or a free fight."

"Keep the witness to the point," admonished the judge, impatiently, as a suppressed laugh broke out in the room. "We want none of this cheap fun."

"Hope you don't call a free fight cheap fun," cried Dick, in a tone of surprise. "The last one I tried on was jist the dearest bit of fun I ever dug into."

After some more of this sparring they at last succeeded in gaining the important fact concerning Dick's residence.

"If we go on at this rate," averred the judge, "we will be all day with this witness. He must answer more directly."

"All right, judge," said Dick, contritely. "Wait till he gits down to solid bottom in his questions, and I kalkulate you'll find me as direct as a streak of lightning."

"That will do, sir. Let me have no more impertinent answers," frowned the judge.

Dick had wit enough to know that it was advisable

just now to hold his tongue. He waited in silence for the next question of the lawyer.

"Do you know the prisoner at the bar?"

"Know Mr. Spencer? Reckon I do. He's jist the worst lied-on gentleman I ever knew."

"State to the jury what you know concerning the counterfeit notes found in his house."

"I know it's a blamed fraud."

"That is not a proper answer. I wish you to state any definite facts you may know about them."

"Bout who? The counterfeiters?"

"Do you know anything about them?" asked the lawyer, quickly.

"Nough to hang them, if it was a hangin' bizness."

"Do I understand you that you know the names of any of these forgers?"

There was considerable interest manifested as Dick addressed himself to reply.

"That's 'bout what I'm tryin' to make you understand," he said. "I know the names of the whole gang. I kin p'int you out where all the queer stuff is manufactured. And what's wuss, I kin tell where the whole durned tribe of them are this minute."

The judge himself started on his seat in surprise at this announcement. A murmur of excitement ran round the circle of auditors.

"That is just what we are all anxious to know," declared the lawyer. "Where are they?"

"S'pose the judge knows," suggested Dick.

"No, sir; but I should be very glad to know," was the judge's reply.

"Thought it mought have worked out by this time. The whole rascally caboodle of them are in Moyamensing!"

The boy's manner was dramatically impressive as he gave this answer. But the unlooked-for statement needed nothing to make it impressive.

"But this is impossible!" cried the prosecuting attorney, in a sharp tone. "What does the boy mean by such an astounding statement?"

"Wait till I git inter your hands," said Dick, sarcastically. "Maybe you kin twist me inter a lie. I know you'll try your hardest; you wouldn't be a lawyer if you didn't try to make a witness both a fool and a liar."

"Does any one here know if what the boy says is true?" demanded the judge.

"It is true," replied Jack Bounce. "They were locked up within the last hour."

"But how is this? I supposed the operations were still a mystery. When and by whom were they discovered and captured? Who are they?"

"The witness can answer as well as I—better for that matter," responded Jack.

"What do you know about this important capture?" demanded the lawyer, of Dick.

"I war there!"

"You saw them captured?"

"Reckon I took a hand in it."

"Relate to the court the whole circumstances."

The audience in the court-room crowded densely around the railing, mouths and ears open, eager to swallow the exciting particulars of this astounding statement.

But Dick's modesty stood in the way of any direct answer to this question, and he evaded the subject by saying:

"Tain't them that's on trial now. It's Mr. Spencer. Ax what you please 'bout him, and I'm on hand. Ain't ready to go outside of the case."

"But who are these men that are captured?"

"There's a set of third-class rogues and one first-class rascal," responded Dick, impressively. "Guess the first-classer is the only chap that's got anything to do with this bizness before the court. He's the one that's down on Harry Spencer, and that hired old Sol Sly to stuff his drawers with counterfeit."

"Will you give his name?"

"It's Andy Williamson, the lawyer."

The exclamations this time were confined to the lawyers, but they were deep and long continued.

Or not entirely confined to the lawyers, for there was one low, distressed cry of that incisive character that makes itself heard above all other sounds. It seemed to come from the valled lady who sat on one side of the room, and whose hands were clasped in nervous agitation.

"This is an outrage!" cried the prosecuting attorney, excitedly rising. "Mr. Williamson is in honorable standing in this court. It is not right to let this boy run on with such ridiculous perjuries."

"Reckon I swore to it!" averred Dick. "Somehow the truth is allers ridiculous to you lawyers. You don't want truth. A good sound lie generally suits you better'n any thing else but a big fee. That's your lay every time. But you've got ter swallow truth now, whether yer likes it or not. Andy Williamson's in quod, whether it gives you the tooth-ache or no."

"When were these men captured, and by whom?" asked Spencer's counsel.

"We sprung the trap on them last night," announced Dick. "Three detectives, your humble servant, and a lot of fillin'-in folks. We burst open their den, got all their tools, and snatched the rascals to the tune of half a dozen little rogues and one big villain."

"Where was this den?"

"Ain't this kinder sailin' in outside waters?" asked Dick. "There's Mr. Spencer in a place where he ain't got no right. Jest put through his job first. These other trifles kin wait."

"Trifles, then, you think them?"

"They're not to the p'int, nobow. You can bring back Sol Sly now. I reckon he won't be feared now to tell what his papers was, and who hired him to put them where he did. When that's done you can give our lied-on friend a boost out of that box. And then Jack Bounce here kin tell you the whole bizness."

Harry Spencer's eyes lit up with a new light at this proposition from his young friend, for he felt keenly the disgrace of his position. During the whole day he had kept his eyes persistently from that part of the court-room where sat the valled lady. He seemed to know instinctively what face lay behind that close veil.

After some busy whispering among the lawyers, Dick's advice was taken, and Solomon Sly recalled. This individual was quite crestfallen at the turn events had taken, and well disposed to turn State's evidence. He acknowledged now that he had received the package from Williamson, and that he believed it contained counterfeit notes.

After asking the protection of the court, he proceeded to make a clean breast of his connection with the forgers, and how he had been engaged by them as one of the distributors of their counterfeit money.

He knew nothing further of their operations, and knew none of the gang except Williamson, who had kept himself well supplied.

At this juncture, without taking further evidence, the attorney for the defense rested his case, and gave it in a short but strong speech to the jury.

The latter body did not leave their box, and needed but a minute's consultation to pronounce the prisoner "not guilty."

There was a moment of excited whispering in the room, and faces and hands of warm sympathy were extended to Harry Spencer as he left the dock a free man, after his most perilous struggle with a dark conspiracy against him.

He proceeded as rapidly as sympathizing friends would permit to the place occupied by the valled lady. Here he seated himself, taking her hand in an earnest clasp, and whispering a few words in her ear, which she seemed to return with equal earnestness.

But a new turn was now given to the attention of the court by the voice of the judge, who asked:

"And now that the court stands adjourned from this trial, will Mr. Bounce—to whom we have been referred by our youthful witness—satisfy the curiosity of us all in giving an account of how these mysterious forgers were captured?"

"I shall be happy to do so as far as lies in my power," answered Jack. "Our young friend, Dick Darling, knows more about the case than any other person, as he has all the credit of having detected the rogues. But I can give you an idea of the affair."

All eyes were turned with new interest upon Dick, who occupied a rather prominent position, having coolly seated himself immediately upon the adjournment of the court. Looks were wasted upon our independent youth, however. With his chin in his two hands and elbows on knees, he listened with a sort of careless interest to the account given by the detective.

Jack made a long but very interesting story of it, and wound up with a warm tribute of compliment to Dick.

"S'pose we drop all that," said this latter personage, impatiently. "I've got a bit more of work cut out for you, Mr. Bounce, afore this thing gits out."

"What is that?" demanded Jack, quickly.

"We've only got the makers of this queer money. Now, there's half a dozen pushers of it in this here town," said Sol Sly. "I kin put my fingers on four of them in a minit's warnin'. Git a force of four or five perlice at wunst, and come with me. There ain't a minit to be lost. If the newspapers git it once, the jig's up."

Dick sprang from his seat as Jack came promptly forward in response to his summons. On passing from the court he stopped a moment beside Harry Spencer, taking his hand, and saying in a lowered voice:

"Meet me at the lady's entrance to the Continental, say 'bout three o'clock this afternoon. Don't miss. There's bizness afoot."

Harry had not got over his surprise at this appointment ere Dick and his confrere were gone.

Their raid was successful. Within two hours afterward four others were added to the list of prisoners under arrest.

CHAPTER XXV.

LOVE WAITS NO MORE.

HARRY SPENCER has somehow found favor in the capacious eyes of Mrs. Andrews. It may be because her daughter has communicated certain discoveries, or beliefs, respecting the mystery of his birth which have changed her opinion. At all events, she has discovered that business demands her presence elsewhere, and hopes that the young people will excuse her.

They excuse her very readily, and seem quite capable of passing an hour pleasantly by their own two sweet selves.

"To think of that man having visited me! And of his even daring to make love to me!" she said, with some fierceness of tone.

"And of his double-dealing with me; so fair to my face, and yet so treacherous."

"But is it not too dreadful to think of?" she cried, shudderingly. "I cannot but pity the man, despite his criminal actions. That any one I have known should be the inmate of a prison!"

"I very narrowly escaped being one," and Harry edged still nearer.

"You did that," she replied, her warm, young face turning with earnest emotion to him. "But that would have been different!"

"In what way different?" he demanded, his eyes meeting hers with an entranced glance.

"What a queer vein of talk we have drifted into. I scarcely know how. Let us change the subject. Play something, Mr. Spencer." And starting up she opened the piano, turning a very rosy face away from his eyes.

"What shall it be?" he asked.

"Oh, what you will."

"Then we will go back to our old lesson of 'Love Waits.' And you shall sing it with me this time."

"Always that old lesson," poutingly.

"Do you not like it?"

"Oh, one gets tired of old lessons, you know. However, I will try it. Just this once."

He smiled, and struck the piano, playing a soft prelude to the air.

He sung the first verse over, she remaining silent.

"But I thought you were going to join me?"

"I wanted to catch the air. I shall try the next verse with you."

His voice rung out with a full melody, now softened and enriched by her sweet tones, till the whole room thrilled with music.

"She is as winsome as the summer rose."

Ah! false was he that painted love's eyes blind! The stars are paled when those bright orbs unclosed.

Love waits no more when love's soft heart grows kind.

"Love waits no more!" The room rung and vibrated with the soft refrain. His eyes met hers with a look that seemed to say that love no more was blind.

He rose suddenly, took her hand, and led her to the sofa.

"Love waits no more," he repeated, his voice full of a thrilling earnestness that was instinct with music to her ears. "It has waited till the clouds should pass away and the sun should rise. One cloud still remains, dear Helen, but my love can wait no longer the dear assurance that it is not given in vain."

"There is no cloud between you and me," she said, laying her soft hand confidently in his.

"What shall I understand by this?" he cried passionately, their faces so near that her flowing hair brushed his cheek. "I have not hoped and trusted in vain? My love has met its true response in your heart?"

"Love need wait no more," was her smiling answer, as she turned her face half away to hide a rosy blush.

"Ah! that divine old lesson!" he exclaimed warmly, his arm gliding around her waist, and drawing her closer to his side. "Helen, dear Helen! you have made me so supremely happy to-day. Look at me, dear! I cannot bear to have your eyes turned away."

She turned her face, blushes and all, to his, so sweet and warm with love that filled its every line, that it was more by unconscious attraction than by volition that their lips touched and pressed each other, in young love's first, long, clinging kiss.

And still they sat, tender words, warm looks, and soft kisses eking out that sweet conversing of affection so stupid to the world at large, so full of divine meaning to the happy couple interested.

And thus we leave them, having at last found words to speak what they had long since told each other in looks and tones—the very happiest love's under that day's sun.

CHAPTER XXVI.

MOTHER AND SON.

AT the appointed hour Harry Spencer was at the spot designated by Dick, the ladies' entrance to the Continental Hotel. He had not long to wait. His youthful friend soon hove in sight, accompanied by the detective, Jack Bounce.

"I am glad to see you," declared the latter, heartily. "I have not had an opportunity to congratulate you on your fortunate escape."

"For which I have principally to thank you and our wide-awake young friend here," answered Harry, gratefully.

"You did have a narrer squeak," admitted Dick.

"But bless you, I was bound to pull you through. But this ain't to the p'int; s'pose we h'ist ourselves up-stairs."

"What are we to do there?" asked Harry, curiously.

"Goin' to call on a lady friend, who's sorter anxious to know you."

In a few minutes more they were ushered into the presence of Mrs. Milton, who sat expecting them.

Harry turned his eyes with a start of warm interest upon the sad, sweet face of the lady before him.

"Did I not see you in court yesterday?" he asked.

"Yes. I would have been there to-day had I been able. This gentleman has informed me of your fortunate escape from the conspiracy against you."

Her voice seemed to stir new chords of feeling within his breast. He grew slightly pale as he hastily sat down, his eyes fixed with an eager intensity upon her face.

She seemed no less affected by his presence. Her eyes turned inquiringly to Dick.

"Got the medal I guv yer?" he asked.

"Yes," she replied, producing it.

"Why, that is my medal!" exclaimed Harry, in surprise. "Where did you get it?"

"That's too long a story to be gone through now," answered Dick. "I got it. That's enough to begin on."

"May I not repeat your question?" came in trembling tones from the lady. "Where did you get this medal?"

"It has always been mine," confessed Harry, with kindling eyes. "I do not remember the time in which I have not had it. I elung to it through all of a hard life."

"Your life has been a hard one, then?"

"Yes. My early years were passed in the hands of a dreadful old woman, who used me brutally."

Since I escaped from her I have had a desperate fight with the world. I finally found some good friends, who gave me a start in a more respectable life."

"And is that all? Does your memory go no further back?"

"Yes," answered Harry, eagerly. "I have faint memories of an earlier time. I can just recall a large stone house, with pretty grounds around it, in which I must have lived when very young. I remember, too, a tall, handsome gentleman, and a beautiful lady, dressed in blue silk."

His eyes were fixed upon her face with the earnestness of awakening recognition. She trembled, growing pale and red by turns. She could hardly keep in her chair.

"Is there anything more?" she asked, clasping the medal nervously.

"Very little," he replied. "I can just recall a fall from my mother's arms—I suppose it must have been my mother," he continued, with a questioning look at her. "There was a toy, too, of which I have a distinct recollection. It was a black figure in a box, which sprung up on touching a spring. I still remember the trouble I was in when I let it fall and broke its nose."

She could keep in no longer. The instinctive feeling she had entertained had grown assurance.

"Oh! it is he! my son! my long-lost son!" she cried, in a tone of infinite joy, rising and moving toward him with extended arms. "I felt it in my soul when I first met you."

"And I, too, mother!" he cried, with a long, eager dwelling upon the word.

He rose, too, with the same irresistible impulse which had moved her. In a moment they were in each other's arms, the mother clasping him to her heart with a warm embrace, in which all the past years of her longing love seemed to find expression.

They stood for minutes thus clasped, looking into each other's eyes, murmuring only inarticulate words.

"Come, Dick," said Jack Bounce, in a low tone; "we can return again."

"I s'pose so," reluctantly. The boy's face was flushed with a warm emotion. He looked positively handsome at that moment. He seemed loth to be drawn away from a new experience in his young life.

"Oh! do not go!" cried Mrs. Milton, hastily turning. "I have been thoughtless in my love."

"We have but a few words to say," replied Jack. "We know you must prefer to be alone at present."

"We will hear you through, at all events," said Harry, smiling with the perfect happiness which had dawned upon him that day.

"I have only to say that your child was stolen from you by an old crone, who has been caught in more than one case of child-stealing. Her object has been to sell their fine clothes, and then to make them objects of sympathy in her begging. Dick, here, has fortunately discovered her. I have just paid her a visit, and forced her to acknowledge the whole truth."

"Dick, again!" cried Harry, smiling. "Dick is a very jewel. But how has he learned so much? I never told him my history."

"You told me enough of it," explained Dick. "I knowed what that trip to Chester was for. I twigg'd Williamson's game to git all the p'int's he could from you, and then play them off on this lady. Not all at once, though. I took it in, bit by bit."

"Tell us all about it," plead Harry. "It must be an interesting story."

Dick proceeded to do so, they all listening with great attention to his account of his adventures in the pursuit of knowledge under difficulties.

"It wasn't himself Williamson was working for," declared Dick. "It's too well knowned who *he* is. It was that Cap. Parker, who I s'pose never had no father or mother, and so was open to take on a rich stepmother. I'm glad you escaped taking him in, ma'am, for he's an out-and-out beat."

Dick expressed this last opinion with such energy as to set them all laughing.

"I do not think he would have succeeded very well, despite all his stolen proofs," averred Mrs. Milton. "As for my Harry, here, he has all the proof I need in his face. However, I thank you from my heart for your wonderful success in overcoming the schemes of these villains. I shall never forget what I owe you."

"Shake hands with me, ma'am," said Dick, starting up.

"Certainly," she replied, with a warm smile, as she offered him her hand.

Dick shook it vigorously, his face lighting up with warm enthusiasm.

"That's pay," he declared, fervently. "Never touched a real lady's hand afore. Mr. Harry Spencer, you're a lucky feller, that's all I've got to say. Such mothers ain't picked up every day. Come, Mr. Bounce, I guess we've 'bout wore out our welcome."

Jack seemed of the same opinion, and followed Dick from the room, after having bidden good-by to the happy parent and child.

Despite their interest in what they had heard, they were glad to be alone, and spent an hour of such communion as comes but once in any one's life. The mother's heart, closed by grief for years, opened to the new joy which had dawned upon her life, and her feeling for her new-found son was that absorption of soul into soul which alone makes a true union of two natures.

Harry, too, had so long yearned for a mother's love, and had repined so bitterly over the mystery of his life, that his love bloomed out for his mother

as a flower bursts open its enveloping leaves, and grows at once into perfect bloom.

During their long communion many new facts came to his recollection, each one an added proof of his identity with the lost son. Mrs. Milton, however, asked and desired no further proof than had already come to her, her faith in and love for her son being of that perfect nature that disdains the shadow of doubt.

A knock at the door finally recalled them to recollection of the outer world. Harry opened it, admitting a young lady, who started back on observing him.

"Excuse me, Mrs. Milton," she said, "I was not aware you had company."

"You know this young gentleman, I believe?" and the mother smiled sweetly.

"Yes," answered the young lady, faintly. "He is an acquaintance of mine."

"Her music-teacher," put in Harry, with like faintness of tone.

"He is my son," and Mrs. Milton spoke with affecting earnestness.

"Oh! I knew it! I knew it!" cried Helen, eagerly, "I felt that it must turn out so!"

"I did not think you would be so enthusiastic about it."

"But I could not help feeling a deep interest in your bereavement."

"And was that all? Was there no interest in this dear boy's bereavement?"

Helen stammered as she attempted to answer, turning away her flushed cheek.

"Ask Harry," she at length managed to say, in a very low tone.

"I am referred to you," and Mrs. Milton turned to her son.

"I have but one answer," putting his arm round Helen's waist, and kissing the lips that were turned up to him with an innocent willingness that was beautiful to behold.

"I love her, and I know that she loves me. Should she not be deeply interested in me, then, mother?"

"I know, and I love her, too, Harry," said Mrs. Milton, taking the young couple in her arms. "And I know that we three will be ever so happy, while life lasts, in each other's love."

CHAPTER XXVII.

FINALE.

AND now that we have followed our characters to the full exposure of the villains, and the reuniting of the long parted mother and son, it is but justice to the readers that we detain them no longer over the commonplace lives of completely happy or thoroughly unhappy people. It is only those whose lives are well checkered with sunshine and shade who are interesting characters in a story.

As for winding up Dick Darling's history, why, bless you, as he would say, we have taken him but to the threshold of a life that overflowed with adventures. It would need ten stories like this to tell all that Dick afterward went through in his new role of detective, and in more or less connection with his trio of official friends.

His next public appearance was as witness against the gang of counterfeiters. The evidence against them was so direct and conclusive that there was not a shadow of hope of their escape from the punishment they deserved.

Dick's graphic description of how he had gradually traced them, excited the greatest interest in the court, and was listened to by Williamson with a look of baffled fury. He had not been able to conjecture before how his well-laid schemes had been unfolded.

Will Frazer was present with the material which he had brought from the haunted house, consisting of the most complete set of counterfeiting tools and material conceivable. He also had learned some new points concerning their modes of procedure.

It seemed that the old house belonged to Williamson, and had been fitted up by him quietly for the purposes intended. The interior cellar had been prepared by his men, and the skillfully-devised door constructed. It was so perfect an imitation of the real wall that no one, not having reason to suspect its character, could ever have discovered it.

There had also been built up a large flue, communicating with the wide chimneys above, which served for purposes of ventilation, and as a draught for their forge when in use, and also, by the aid of interior ladders, as a means of escape.

Among its other interesting uses, this chimney was the chief means by which the ghost business was kept up. These spectral visitants never troubled themselves to walk except on such occasions as valorous parties attempted to brave them by spending the night in the old house.

Then, by the aid of the ready chimney, such a concert of groans, door-slammings and noisy footsteps was kept up as utterly to dismay the brave ghost-seekers, especially as the noisy rooms became at once silent and deserted when the investigators approached them.

By this plan prying eyes were driven effectually from the old house, and if, by chance, any of the gang themselves were seen about it, the natural conjecture was that they were either ghost-seekers, or, to the more marvelously inclined, that they were the unquiet spirits themselves.

The trial ended in a general conviction of the accused, their sentences running from five to fifteen years at hard labor, according to their degree of complicity with the crime.

Joe Turner was released, as it was shown that he knew nothing of the counterfeiting, being employed by Williamson in minor schemes of villainy, of which the chief was his effort to impose on Mrs. Milton with a fictitious son.

It proved that Williamson had long known the

story of her bereavement, and becoming acquainted with some points of the history of Harry Spencer, had arrived at the correct conclusion, and at once attempted to manipulate it to his own purposes.

That he signally failed, and is yet expiating in prison the discovered crimes of which he had been so long guilty, we say with pleasure.

Of course there was a wedding. And Mrs. Andrews was present in all the glory of silken resignation to her daughter's choice. And Mrs. Milton was there in all the joy of perfect contentment. And Jack Bounce was there, big and jovial as usual. And Dick Darling was present, with a wonderfully polished face, and a bran-new suit, not bought from Sol Sly. And hundreds of others were there, of the *élite* of the Quaker City.

And the happiest lovers under the sun were that day made one, still singing in their hearts "Love waits no more," and seeing in each other's eyes the windows to a heaven of happiness vouchsafed to few mortals on this earth.

And they still continue too happy to interest us further, for, as we have said, perfectly happy people have no story worth telling, it needing a spice of trouble to make the romance of life.

Dick Darling has not forgotten them in their pleasant homes, but condescends to favor them with an occasional visit, in which he usually contrives to waken them up with a spice of his fresh, young spirit.

He is still Dick Darling, the sauciest, liveliest, most independent boy going, with a little of the roughness rubbed off, but not a particle of the shrewdness or self-assurance.

Dick was not without substantial reward for his valuable services in tracing the mysterious gang which had so long baffled the detectives. Jack Bounce saw that some of the Secret Service funds of the government should flow into the capacious pockets of his new clothes. And Mrs. Milton also proved that her gratitude extended beyond thanks, so that Dick has a small fortune of his own as a result of his services.

"I don't vally the money so much, though," he says, "as I do the peace and quiet that a man of property gets. It was allers at home, that 'arnal young rascal of a Dick! And every other step put me in somebody's way, or else flung a scoldin' in my way. But, sure as you live now, my cross old aunty has found out that my name's Richard, and she's got jist as sweet as a plum that's been layin' for six months in a jar of sugar."

"And what are you going to do for a living, Dick?" asks Jack Bounce, as he tilts his chair back at its usual dangerous angle, and plants his heels on the window-sill. "You are old enough now to be laying out some plan for your future life."

"I dunno," says Dick, scratching his head doubtfully. "Can't see that I've showed myself fit for much of anything yet, 'cept it's smellin' out dubious rascals. Had an idear once that mebbe I mought make a good detective."

"I doubt that," declared Will Frazer, somewhat sharply. "Not but what you are quick-witted enough. But our business is one that needs heart and soul in it if one would be successful. And I fancy that it has been with you a mere bit of skylarking."

"If skylarkin' pays better than heart and soul, so much the better for the skylarkin'," retorts Dick, sturdily; "but I've a sorter notion that I ain't quite as big a fool as you buy me for. I've had three things in my eye in this little bit of detective bizness; and them things is glory, profit and fun. Glory's well enough in its way. It ain't to be sneezed at. Profit's better, for a pocket well stuffed with dingbats is jist the best karacter goin', and a gold dollar 'll buy more than a good deed any time. But fun's the best of all. That's what puts meat on a man's bare bones, and makes dry bread taste like pound-cake. You kin have all the glory and profit goin', if you'll only see that I'm kept up well in fun. That's Dick Darling's philosophy."

"There was a heavy old philosopher lost in you, Dick," adds Ned Hogan, taking his favorite meerschaum from his lips. "You had better put yourself in my hands. I will make a man of you. I think I know your natural line of business."

"Mr. Bounce is ahead of you," announces Dick, reflectively. "Can't say as I'm ready to guv any answer jist yit. It's a heavy s'ponsibility, and I want time to think it over. But if there's any bit of private work you want done in the way of findin' out things, why, jist give me the wink—ticularly if there's any fun in it."

Dick, since then, has put through more than one important case, and is favorably known to the force as the most promising apprentice in this business. But he has taken care not to tie himself to any one's leading strings, and always gives his official friends to understand, in his usual independent manner, that he intends to run his own detective agency.

THE END.

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